

# The Prospective Removal Of The Academy To A New Home Near Roland Park ...

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## The Prospective Removal Of The Academy Of The Visitation To A New Home Near Roland Park Recalls History Of The Convent

The Home And School Of The Order Of The Visitation Is A Place Of Happy Memories To Generations Of Maryland Women Who Have Received Academic And Spiritual Education From The Gentle Sisters Of The Order.

By EMILY EMERSON LANTZ.

WHO among Baltimoreans is unacquainted with the familiar aspect of the Baltimore Academy of the Visitation, located for nearly a century at the northwest corner of Park avenue and Centre street? And who, if privileged to know them at all, does not love the religious community of 50 or more gentle ladies who inhabit the imposing brick edifice of five stories that includes the academy, with numerous classrooms and fine assembly hall; the chapel, surmounted by the cross of redemption, and the monastery, all of which, including the cloister garden, occupy an acre of most valuable land in the very heart of the fair city of Baltimore.

Perhaps it is because of the convent's nearness to the throbbing life of the community, perhaps it is because of the daily pilgrimages of many, many little children to its classrooms; perhaps it is because of a certain distinction characteristic of the nuns of this order, which was founded by St. Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, in 1610, and established by the Baroness St. Jane Frances de Chantal, a very noble lady of France. Whatever the cause, the Visitation nuns on Park avenue are peculiarly dear to the people of Baltimore, who feel their presence in the city a reason for gladness, as their departure thence at any time would be an occasion of deep regret.

Yet at almost any hour the long contemplated sale of the nunnery property may be consummated, and the community of Sisters transferred to and re-established, in a new home to be built for them on an estate of six acres already acquired for them that is located at Roland and Belvidere avenues, just north of Roland Park.

"So often we have thought we were about to sell the present property and remove to Roland Park," said one of the nuns, who for 22 years served as directress of the academy, and who is also a mother of the religious community, "but now the gentlemen into whose hands the real estate affairs of the community are entrusted give us every reason to believe that a sale of this ground and buildings is likely near at hand, and we are anticipating the possibility of removal with mingled emotions of pleasure and pain.

"The site designed for the new monastery is exceptionally fine and the convent will have six acres of ground, instead of one. The buildings planned are an academy, a monastery and chapel; and while we might not be allowed to build a high wall about the nunnery there, such as we are accustomed to and like here, we would rejoice in greater space of garden and more modern building equipments. It seems as though the world needs, especially at the present time, the spiritual training that the nuns of the Visitation Order strive to combine with their educational work. War has awakened men to the great spiritual needs of the hour, but people forget so soon, and spiritual training of the young is so vital."

The nun sat in the spacious old library of the convent with a Sister by her side and their tranquil faces and graceful dress were significant of the harmony and order of their lives. It is a peculiarly graceful garb, that which the nuns of the Visitation Order wear. The plaited skirt of black serge and the long gracious sleeves of the bodice worn with its statuesque in line, while the square of white linen at the throat is unstarched and sweetly softening to the face. There is a touch of white also about the wrist and the head covering of black nun's veiling falls with classic lines about the head and shoulders. The silver cross of the order rests upon the breast. Convent tradition tells us that the veil, so charming in its simplicity, was designed by Bishop Francis de Sales, founder of the order.

When Madame de Chantal was designing the habit to be worn by members of the Visitation she naturally selected it with the taste of a woman accustomed to the elegancies of a noble environment. The garb is pleasing to the eye, but the fashioning of the veil was beyond her skill. As she sat, perplexed Bishop de Sales visited the little community and, woman-like, she appealed to him for direction. With masculine daring he seized the scissors and, by good fortune, cut the veil so well that for three centuries it has imparted distinction and chastened beauty to its wearers.

Asked concerning the past of the religious house of which she is a member, the Mother smiled. "It is a long, long history," she said, "and closely linked with the girlhood memories of the women of Baltimore. There are now 21 convents of the Visitation Order in the United States, and ours was the second to be established, the first house of the order in this country having been established at Georgetown in 1816 by the Rev. Dr. Leonard Neale, second Archbishop of Baltimore. Our community was established in 1827, while the Rev. Samuel Eccleston was Archbishop of the See of Baltimore. The academy's first place of residence was at the northeast corner of Greene and Mulberry streets, a house afterward bought by Mr. Alfred Jenkins, whose daughter is now one of our order. She admitted you at the door when you entered.

"On November 1, 1837, Mother M. Juliana Matthews, from the Visitation Convent at Georgetown, D. C., arrived in Baltimore with 10 Sisters to organize the new community. On December 4 they opened their academy and two years later the Sisters removed to Park avenue and Centre street, which was planned to meet their cloistered needs.

"The academy was a boarding as well as a day school until Mount de Sales of the Visitation Order was established in 1854, near Catonsville, and the first boarding school girls under instruction at our school, were Miss Burrows and Eliza McClellan, of Baltimore, and Caroline Pye, of Charles county. When we first occupied this convent building it extended only across the front. The scholastic and monastery wings were added later.

"Since the Sisters have been established here all the most famous ecclesiastics visiting the city have celebrated or

attended mass in our chapel, which is the height of the building, with galleries communicating with every floor. All the archbishops of Baltimore have been deeply interested in the development and welfare of the community, and I used to see love to sit with the older nuns and hear them tell of important events in the religious history of Baltimore and the notable prelates who had assembled before our altar.

"Considering its length of years the academy has not had many changes of directresses. The first was Sister Mary Theresa White and the others Sister Mary Pauline Millard, Sister Mary Leonard Neale, Sister M. Bernadine Millard, Sister Mary Agatha Scott, Sister Mary Placide Wallace, Sister Mary Philomena Holahan, Sister Mary Scholastica Wroth (who is now serving a second term of office), and Sister Mary Raphael Martin.

"The nuns enjoy fairly good health at all times and often live to be exceedingly old—80 years, 95 years, 99 years of age. While the life is one of complete surrender to discipline and duty, it is very happily free—except to the executive members of the community—from all responsibility for the present and all fear for the future, and golden jubilees that celebrate 50 years of professed membership of the order are occasions of interest to all. The cloistered nuns occupy the monastery where, of course, none ever go save the physician."

"Why do you call it monastery, Mother?" asked the visitor. "Is not a monastery a place where monks dwell?"

"No, the Latin word monasterium is derived from a Greek word that signifies a solitary dwelling, to dwell alone. All members of the order spend much time alone in their cells—except when occupied with duties of the day—and alas, in these intensive times, it grows more and more difficult even for religious to be alone."

"And are they happy, thus alone?"

The nun smiled brightly. "Indeed, indeed they are, or they would not be here."

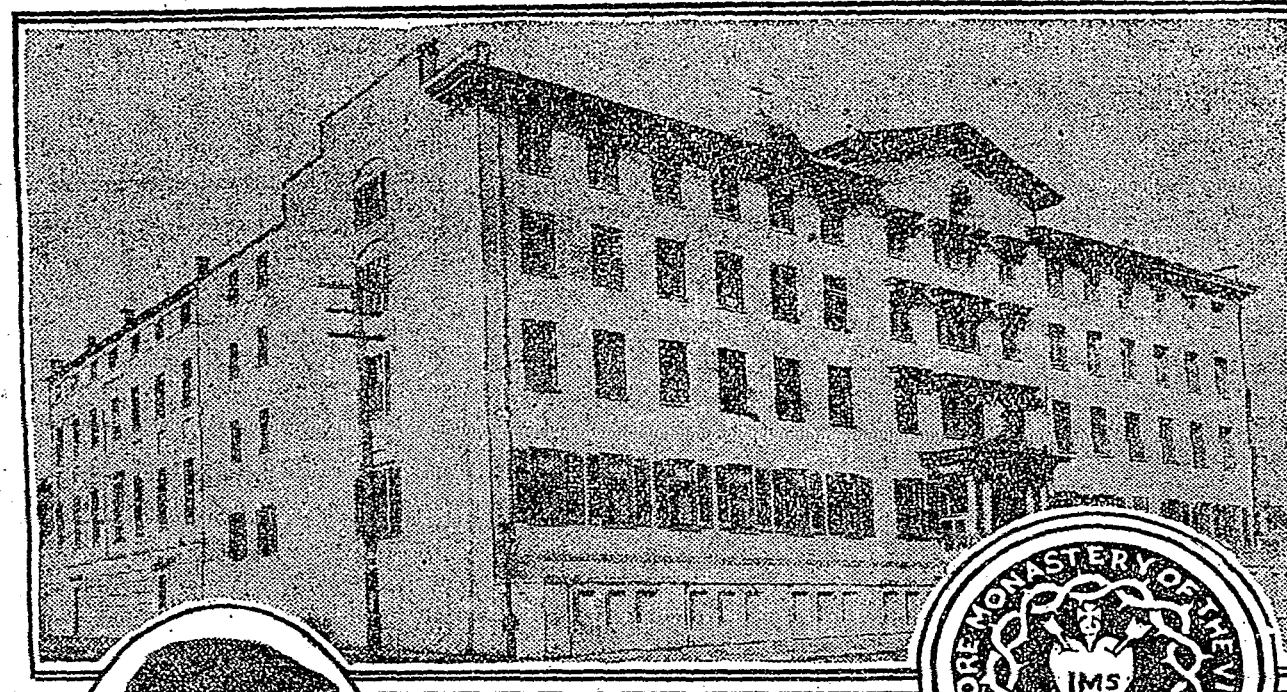
"The convent probably has a good library, has it not?" the Sister was asked.

Before replying the religious glanced with affection about the pleasant room. "This is the library of the academy," she replied. "Here many books are secular and for reference, but we also have a library on the cloister side where the books are all of spiritual character."

"The most valued picture the community possesses is a painting of the Crucifixion, which is said to be a genuine Rubens. Beautiful adornments for the chapel are often given us by former graduates, and we owe such electrical equipment as we have to the Alumnae Association."

"To many Baltimore families this building is home. Mother Xavier, one of the oldest nuns, told me she recalled five generations of girls from one family taught here, and I recall several instances where grandmother, daughter and grandchild have been instructed in the school. To all of these the convent has been a spiritual and educational home. How the girls love to come back, if only to share one convent meal with us!

"Lady Lily Bagot is a Visitation girl and, in truth, they are scattered all over the world. Many have distinguished themselves as musicians, others in medicine, art and science. Names on the school list represent Maryland very truly during nearly a century. Here are such names as Hilselberger, Clifton, Bil-



ST. JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL

lups, Tubman, Semmes, Dugan, Merrick, Hall, Tyson, Highman, Key, Jenkins, Holloway, Channing, Brown, Williams, Willard, Stewart, Scott, Roper, Wynn, Moale, Neale, White, Howard, Gittings, Tiffany, LaRoue, Carroll, Combs, Griffith, Sappington, Ulman, Wall, Boggs, Luckett, Torney, Capron—most beautiful the Copran girls were—Stoan, Milholland, O'Donnell, Joyce, Smith, Little, Garuendia, Goldsborough, Wade, Spalding, Wilcox, Benzinger, Butters, Heusler, MacManus, Lambden, Bonet, Denmead, Shriver, Van Bibber, Chatard, Kirkland, Acosta, Boone, Cromwell, Rasin, Folev, Passano—all

names identified with Baltimore. But they have come from all other parts of the United States as well and even from other countries.

"Can you ever be reconciled to leaving the convent garden, the old vine-covered walls, the fruit trees that blossomed in May?"

Shadows fell across the serene faces of both nuns and one silently left the room and returned with a clipping from THE SUN that contained a poem entitled "A Convent Garden." It bore the signature of Folger McKinsey (The Bentztown Bard) and was dedicated "To the Sisters of the Visitation." It read:

Outside the walls the city sounds were heard,  
Softened and sanctified—within  
For the rapture of a warbling bird,  
Only Peace here lays its hand upon life's din

And something holier than the world's life rose  
On quiet footsteps in this garden close,  
Faith, with the cross of Christ beneath her chin,  
And Purity, within her arms a rose.

The pear bloom had departed when I came,  
But down the southern border stood the daisies

In all their purple beauty smiling sweet,  
And all their stately loveliness attained—  
Only a wall between them and the street,  
And long so far they seemed from all that drags

Life in the dust with agony and care;  
For here the hallowed Sisters came in prayer

And lowly meditation through the hours  
Their gentle discipline gives nerve to move  
In purity of their so-holy love  
Amid the grassy lawns and pleasant flowers.

It was another world wherein I trod—  
A world of peace amid a world of storm,  
A living garden of the living God—  
A cloistered calm upon it all the warm,  
Bright sunshine kissing grass and leaf  
And tree,

As children kiss the cheeks they love  
With glee—

This garden of the nuns, this holy place  
Where war and carnage, sin and strife are  
not

But only faith and truth and tender grace,  
And gentle Sisters tending each her plot,  
Nursing the roses from the altar sent  
Until deep-rooted and with nature blent,  
Once more they take new life and add  
their gift

Of beauty to the world wherein we drift.

Outside the walls the city beat its tune—  
But, oh, within, how silent and how fair  
This sanctuary blossomed to my sight!  
How simple, sweet and old a nook of June.

Inviting life to lay aside its care,  
To cast the burden of its sin away  
And on His Sacred Heart intone a prayer  
For strength to face again the daily fray.

The Mother led the way to the breezy veranda that overlooked the garden  
bright with sunset glow. It fell upon  
velvet lawn and quiet walks, and upon  
the marble cenotaph erected to the mem-

ory of Archbishop Eccleston, who established the order in Maryland. "We can scarcely think of leaving the garden," she said, "for here we walk and sometimes bring our work, and here always, from month to month, some flower blooms. St. Francis de Sales, called the runs of the Visitation Order little March violets because of their humility, and the flower is the flower of the order, and its colors, white and lavender, the colors of the school."

"Only two little shade trees live."

"The cherry trees that used to bloom are gone, but the quince, peach and pear trees remain and flags and lilies still line the borders, and roses—always there are roses; even until late in December there is always some little rose. It tore our hearts when workmen dragged away the lovely vines to paint the garden walls, but they are growing up again inside. This year the roses have been less luxuriant than usual—the gardener says the soil is exhausted,

and perhaps it is true." It was evident the Sisters were trying to steel their tender hearts against the enchantment of a spot most dear to them, and felt that since the parting from a home endeared to them by life associations seems inevitable as well as desirable for many reasons, they almost wish the change might come quickly.

The Alumnae Association of the Baltimore Visitation Academy was organized some 16 years ago among graduates of the school and is one of the most active among Maryland chapters of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, which includes 260 affiliated associations in the United States and Canada, with a membership of 50,000 women. Its officers are: President, Mrs. George West Page; first vice-president, Mrs. Harry M. Benzinger; second vice-president, Mrs. Thomas F. Shriver; third vice-president, Mrs. Charles W. Heusler; recording secretary, Mrs. Hilda Smith De Lauder; corresponding secretary,

Miss Margaret Hroug; treasurer, Miss Loretta Burch; historian, Miss Leonore Benzger. Mrs. Benzinger is also recording secretary of the Federation of Catholic Alumnae.