

THUENER, Sister M. Domitilla. October 25, 1880–September 29, 1977.

ST. XAVIER COLLEGE (BA 1920), CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA (CATHOLIC SISTERS COLLEGE) (MA 1923), CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA (PhD 1932).

Eleanor Margaret Thuener was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, the daughter of Josephine (b. 1861) and August Thuener (b. 1856). Her mother was born in Pennsylvania and her father in Germany. He immigrated to the United States in about 1870, and her parents married in about 1879. In the 1900 census her father is described as a driver; in 1910 as a brewery driver. It appears that three children survived of seven who were born. They were Eleanor, Viola [or Violet R.] (b. 1893), and John Lester (1897–1980). Her mother was widowed by 1920.

Eleanor Thuener received her elementary education in public and parochial schools in Allegheny. In the 1900 census she was described as a sewing girl. She graduated from St. Mary's Academy, a Catholic boarding school in Monroe, Michigan, in June 1905, when she was nearly twenty-five, shortly before entering the convent of the Benedictine Sisters in Covington, Kentucky, that summer. She took the religious name Mary Domitilla. From 1905 until 1920 Sister M. Domitilla taught in St. Walburg Academy in Covington and in Villa Madonna Academy, a boarding school for girls run by the Benedictine Sisters in nearby Crescent Springs, Kentucky, across the Ohio River from Cincinnati.

Sister Domitilla obtained her bachelor's degree in 1920 from St. Xavier College (Xavier University since 1930), a Jesuit college for men in Cincinnati, Ohio, by attending special extension classes, scheduled for late afternoons, Saturdays, and summers, arranged for the sisters from neighboring congregations. [Sister Mary Henrietta Reilly](#) also attended St. Xavier under similar circumstances. In 1922–23 Sister Domitilla studied at the Catholic Sisters College associated with the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and received her master's degree in 1923.

Villa Madonna College in Covington was founded by the Benedictine Sisters in 1921 for the education of the sisters of the community and for lay women in northern Kentucky. Sr. Domitilla was the first dean, the senior officer who directed the academic work of the new college, and was the mathematics instructor from 1921 until 1929, when it graduated its first class of five students. In 1929 the college came under diocesan control and was jointly administered by three different religious orders. It was also in 1929 that Sister Domitilla returned to Catholic University, where she completed the work for her PhD in 1932 with a dissertation in algebraic geometry and with minors in physics and education. Upon her return to Villa Madonna College she was professor and department head until 1943; she also taught physics 1934–37. The college became coeducational in 1945. In the late 1960s it relocated to Crestview Hills, Kentucky, and was renamed Thomas More College.

In 1943 Sister M. Domitilla was elected by her community to be the Prioress of St. Walburg Convent. She served two successive terms as administrator and religious leader. In this period she was a member of the board of trustees of Villa Madonna College. Under her direction the community entered hospital work by taking over the administration of a hospital in Kentucky and by staffing a hospital in Colorado. Sister Domitilla was considered to be the “prime mover” in furthering the education of Sister Elizabeth Frisch, O.S.B., who obtained a PhD in 1940 from Catholic University and who followed her as head of the mathematics department at Villa Madonna College.

Sister Domitilla Thuener died at Villa Madonna in Covington, Kentucky, at age ninety-six in 1977.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA.

Thesis and dissertation:

1923 The quadratic law of reciprocity. MA thesis, Catholic Sisters College of the Catholic University of America. Typescript.

1932 On the number and reality of the self-symmetric quadrilaterals in-and-circumscribed to the triangular-symmetric rational quartic. PhD dissertation, Catholic University of America, directed by Aubrey Edward Landry. Printed for The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC.

Abstract:

1936 The number and reality of the self-symmetric quadrilaterals in and circumscribed to the triangular-symmetric rational quartic. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 43:64 #3. Presented to the MAA, Lexington, KY, 4 May 1935. Based on PhD dissertation.

Reference to: AmMSc 7.

Other sources: Owens questionnaires 1937, 1940; Catholic University of America Archives; communication with Saint Walburg Monastery (KY); M. Irmina Saelinger, *Retrospect and vista: the first fifty years of Thomas More College, formerly Villa Madonna College*, 1971: 1–8; US Census 1900, 1910 PA, 1930 DC, 1930 KY.

Last modified: December 13, 2008.