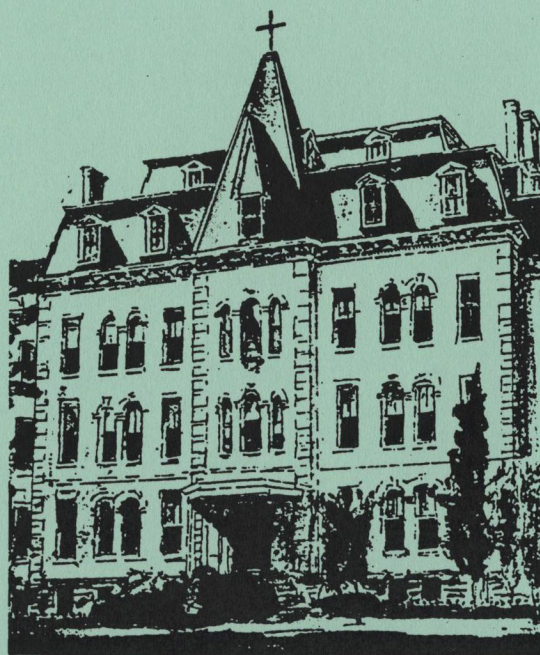


heritage series

the
administration
Building

1874 ~ 1900



--- 75 years ---

THE BEGINNING

The original section of the Administration Building antedates by more than thirty years the existence of D'Youville College. In January 1874, some 108 years ago, the structure was opened officially as the new home for Holy Angels Academy-- a private boarding and day school for young ladies in elementary and secondary grades. It was conducted by the Grey Nuns of the Cross who had come to Buffalo in 1857 from their motherhouse in Ottawa, Ontario.

To pinpoint this section, go outside near the historical marker and then face the Porter Avenue entrance. Try to visualize the structure in its pristine red brick. Next, count four first-floor windows on either side of the entrance and note where the building juts out a bit. Only this part is the original building. It's almost square. See the mansard roof, the bit of Victorian gingerbread and the statue (replaced in 1940) over the entrance. Look all the way up and see a small fifth floor. Before you leave, look carefully behind the shrubbery near the steps and you may be able to detect faint traces of Holy Angels Academy chiseled in the stone there. Perhaps behind this slab is the cornerstone laid with great ceremony on August 4, 1872.

Now go inside to the main hall. Here the parquet floor is the distinguishing mark of the original structure. The President's Office and the Vice-president's Office once were very formal parlors with straight-backed chairs. Then you can follow the stairs down to the lower level and further to a sub-basement. Or you can go up to the second floor where the present business office was first the chapel, then the library, then classrooms. Keep on to the third floor and visualize the present chapel as a Grand Hall for receptions, assemblies, concerts and other gatherings. The now ghostly fourth floor where students and faculty slept in large dormitories is off-limits today as is the fifth floor with its rooms for live-in help and storage of students' trunks. Perhaps the view of the lake from there made the long climb up seem worth while. An elevator was not even in the planning stage.

In 1874 Buffalo had been a city for a mere forty years. The last guns of the Civil War had been fired only nine years before. The country was in the throes of reconstruction. General Ulysses Grant was the president.

THE WEST SIDE

What was the West Side like in 1874? It was a gracious, residential area with tree-lined streets and large stone houses, many of which we would term mansions. (Incidentally, street names underwent several changes. Busti formerly was Front Avenue, Porter was York, Prospect was Ninth and Fargo, Tenth.) The Thompson family home stood on Porter Avenue between Niagara and Seventh amid "grounds of great extent and beauty." Nearby was the palatial residence of William Fargo of Wells Fargo fame. In those days Buffalo deserved its reputation as the city of beautiful homes and beautiful trees.

Dr. Pierce's Hotel, a huge ornate structure around the corner on Prospect was constructed in 1878 and occupied the site of the present college library and probably part of the Health Science Building. The hotel was a residential facility for convalescents and devotees of patent medicines. Only three years later and in two hours' time, the building was leveled by fire and not rebuilt.

Prospect Park was green and beautiful in those 1870's, but a reservoir antedated the Connecticut Street Armory. Much of the area west of Busti Avenue was one of the city's famous parks and was known as The Front. Close by in what is now the Peace Bridge area was Fort Porter with its barracks and army mules and a cannon that was fired each day at five o'clock.

THE FIRE

Five years to the day of the opening of the new building, a disastrous fire raged through the upper floors and gutted the interior above the second floor. Snow, ice and January temperatures added to the destruction. It was a sad ten months before the building could again be used. Sisters and students stayed first with the Miss Nardins and at Dr. Pierce's Hotel, then moved into Holy Angels Rectory. In 1881 When Dr. Pierce's Hotel burned to the ground, the sisters took in residents from that burning structure.

THE WEST WING

Within two years, builders were again at work. Classroom space had become much too limited for the growing number of students. When you go outside again, you will see a row of four windows in the Registrar's area. That rather narrow space is the West Wing. It was completed in 1881.

(continued)

THE EAST WING

Only a few years later in 1900 the East Wing, today's Development and Admissions areas, was completed and became the convent for the sisters teaching at the academy and at the parochial school. This was cloister territory and students could not trespass beyond the closed doors. The doors are gone now but, if you look closely at the end of the parquay floor near the Boethea Room or at the beginning of the Admissions area on the second floor, you can still see the hinges. The lower level, uncloistered, provided the students with cafeteria and kitchen facilities. The cafeteria wall can be traced by the fleur-de-lis pattern on the hall wall. (The fleur-de-lis is an emblem of the French court and a favorite design of the Grey Nuns in honor of King Louis XV who gave permission for the order to be established in Montreal.)

THE PROSPECT WING

With the addition of a third wing, D'Youville College comes into being. But that is another story.

Sister Sheila Driscoll GNSH
D'Youville College Archivist
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