

THE BELLES *Of Saint Mary's*



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AND JUST WHAT IS THE SAINT MARY'S EXPERIENCE?

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In today's Age of Technology and Information it is difficult to define the role of tradition. Certainly we know that traditions are not sacred institutions. What is it then that makes Saint Mary's, a school deeply rooted in tradition, so successful in the education of women?

There are many elements that Saint Mary's graduates, faculty and administration list as making Saint Mary's great. These enduring facets of life at Saint Mary's define the common experience of the students. While last year's high school seniors may not relate to study hall and last year's sophomores cannot believe the college curfews of today, there is a sameness about Saint Mary's that makes the school what it is, was and will be. First, my friends, a little history.

Saint Mary's was founded in 1842 by Reverend Aldert Smedes to provide a place where young ladies of the day might receive a good education as well as the skills that would make them more successful in life. The state legislature offered no provisions for public education so many affluent families taught their children at home or sent them away to school. Saint Mary's was well known because of its integrity and its church affiliation and support.

The school was founded on the Christian principles of knowledge, honor, respect and humility. Its relationship with the diocese of North Carolina was strong. The school gave the Episcopal Church good publicity, and an expanded parish, as well as large donations.

Aldert and Sarah Smedes received the first students as well as their parents on opening day. In the Smedes family the girls found surrogate parents and friends. The Smedes controlled every aspect of their lives. Sarah Smedes oversaw their wardrobes. Aldert Smedes took charge of the hiring of their teachers, reviewing academic

progress and religious duties, their knitting lessons, who they received on "visiting Saturday," their vacations and their accounts in town. He wanted every activity to be worthy of doing and of God. The security of such a family atmosphere gave comfort to homesick girls. Eventually they became a huge family network, all working toward improvement.

Academics at the school met or excelled the level of those studied at other colleges. Girls were taught French, Latin, and German by native speakers. Other teachers were highly regarded. Teachers lived at the school, thus enlarging further the support offered by Saint Mary's.

Saint Mary's was a peaceful haven during the Civil War. Students were at first more concerned with soldiers arriving in Raleigh than political upheaval. Eventually the fighting throughout the state alarmed Dr. Smedes, as well as many of the parents. Students were generally advised to stay in Raleigh. As inflation rose, problems providing food for the girls increased. Tuition, which had been set at \$100 a session rose to \$1000 by 1865. However, many girls were still able to attend school because Dr. Smedes did not demand payment in cash but accepted fresh foods or provisions.

Classes were held until May when many girls went to homes that had been destroyed. Enrollment at the school fell although Smedes made the tuition as affordable as he could. Young women who did attend Saint Mary's after the war found classes to be just as hard as before.

On April 25, 1877, Aldert Smedes died, passing the responsibilities of the school on to his son Bennett. Mr. Smedes was described as more scholarly than his father, and less fatherly, but the school was still recognized throughout the community as a good Christian force for change. Its work in the community during the difficult years after the Civil War was known far and wide. Its reputation was so widely established, that when Bennett

Smedes turned over the financial burden of the school to the Episcopal diocese in 1896, the church immediately went to work establishing Saint Mary's as in the black for good. A board of trustees set up to control the school remained under the direction of the Protestant Episcopal Church in North Carolina. In May of 1897, the school was purchased from the Cameron family for fifty thousand dollars. The Trustees ordered that the charge for attendance at Saint Mary's be reduced by thirty dollars, so that a Saint Mary's education might be "a school not only for benefit of the rich".

The Reverend Bennett Smedes died on February 22, 1899. After his death, Emilie McVea oversaw the running of the school until the Reverend Theodore DeBose Bratton became rector. Bratton radically changed the Saint Mary's experience by forming a two year college. The courses were divided into three curricula- the Classics, the English, and the Science. Each student undertaking college work was required to pick one area. The change was noted at the time as adaption to the times.

Rev. Bratton's cousin, the Reverend McNeely DuBose, took over after Bratton left. DuBose created the positions of Dean of Students and Dean of College. DuBose, who took his work at Saint Mary's very seriously, later died in a hunting accident.

The fifth rector of Saint Mary's was the Reverend George William Lay. A native of New Hampshire, Lay was very excited about Saint Mary's.

Emilie McVea, former principal, returned to give a lecture. She told the ladies to seek whatever job they loved and defy traditions that kept women from professional work. This feminist attitude was met with opposition from most southerners, but Reverend Lay appreciated the idea. His intent was not to alter drastically Saint Mary's but rather to modify its role much the way Reverend Smedes had done 100 years earlier. He held that the school should "reverence the past" yet look

ahead.

Academics during the Lay years became stricter. Diplomas were granted to only a select few. Saint Mary's flourished academically and socially under Lay's guidance.

With the start of World War I the girls of Saint Mary's donated enormous amounts of time, energy and materials to Red Cross. The girls raised \$660 and were widely known for their volunteer work.

The man who led Saint Mary's during the stressful years of the Depression was the Reverend Warren Way. He wished to convert the school into a four year college, but instead defined it as Saint Mary's School and Junior College. Way restrained the girls from inappropriate behavior and even expelled some. Student government became more influential during his tenure. They developed and enforced their own rules.

Fees rose at the time of the Depression, but still could not keep the school out of debt. Holt Hall was erected to bolster admissions, but the new building failed to draw the necessary students. In the midst of heavy financial debt, Way resigned - to the relief of some who felt he too strictly enforced the rules.

After his departure Margaret Jones Cruikshank was installed as head of the school. Not only was she the first woman accepted by the trustees to run the school, she took charge in a time of crisis. She enforced the school's academic standards and added a few courses in keeping with other colleges. In 1933 the trustees voted to grant high school diplomas in place of a certificate that stated a student's ability to enter college.

Richard Gabriel Stone took over when Margaret Cruikshank retired. He ended the ban on on-campus smoking, as smokers existed in such numbers that they could not be controlled. He reduced the size of the honor council and enlarged the hall council. Alcohol consumption was prohibited at Saint Mary's and at all Saint Mary's functions.

Stone repaired many of the

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