

Catholic Women's Colleges in the United States: An Archival, Bibliographic and Historical Survey

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Introduction:

Traditionally, American Catholic history paid little attention to the history of women, or indeed to that of the laity in general. Mary Jo Weaver notes that in James Hennessy's *American Catholics* (1981), fewer than 50 of nearly 1300 index items refer to women in any way, and of 331 pages of text, material about women adds up to approximately ten pages. Robert Trisco's bicentennial volume *Catholics in America, 1776-1976* contains only seven pictures of women and buildings outnumber women two to one.¹ Since the early 1980s, however, the combined impact of social history, with its rediscovery of previously under-represented groups, and the feminist movement, has led to better representation of women in general works on the history of American Catholicism, and a number of specific works on the history of Catholic women.² Some examples are James J. Kennelly, *A History of American Catholic Women*. (New York: Crossroad, 1990); Karen Kenneally, C.S.J.'s collection of essays *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), part of the Bicentennial History of the Catholic Church in America; the work of Colleen McDannell on Catholic domesticity,³ and a special issue of *U.S. Catholic Historian* on women in 1991. A particularly thriving area is the history of Catholic sisters, represented by the work of Mary Ewens, Mary J. Oates, Margaret

¹Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

²Margaret Susan Thompson, "Women, Feminism and the New Religious History: Catholic Sisters as a Case Study," in *Belief and Behavior: New Essays in Religious History*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

³See Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

Susan Thompson, and many others. In fact, historians of women religious have formed a professional organization, the History of Women Religious Conference, which holds yearly meetings, publishes a newsletter, and maintains a Website, Sister Site <http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/1114/>, and a listserv, Sister-L (sister-l@listserv.syr.edu), founded in 1994.

In spite of this new flowering of historical research, relatively few scholars have examined the history of Catholic women's colleges, which at one time constituted an important sector of American higher education, and today make up the majority of colleges for women. Study of these colleges throws light on the history of the accumulation of Catholics to American middle-class society, and fills a gap in the history of women's education and the history of Catholic higher education. As well as being neglected by scholars, these colleges have been misrepresented by the media. This essay will begin to fill in this gap, by first presenting a brief overview of the history of Catholic women's colleges, followed by a bibliographic survey of the small number of existing studies that discuss them. Finally, I will sample some of the rich archival sources that could contribute to a better understanding of their history, and suggest possible avenues for further research.

Historical Overview:

Because of opposition from Church authorities, higher education for Catholic women did not begin until the end of the 19th century. The first Catholic women's college, the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, near Baltimore, was established in 1895 when the School Sisters of Notre Dame expanded their girls' academy to offer a college-level course of study. It was soon followed by the College of St. Elizabeth in Morristown, New Jersey (1899); Trinity College in

Washington, D.C. (1900); St. Joseph's College in Emmitsburg, Maryland (1902); and St. Angela's College, later known as the College of New Rochelle (1904). Trinity College, founded by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, was the only one founded expressly as a college rather than as an extension of an existing girls' academy.

In the following decades, however, as Church authorities realized that Catholic women were flocking to state colleges and universities, the numbers of Catholic women's colleges expanded exponentially. In 1921, there were 38; in 1930, 74; and by 1955, there were 116 four-year colleges and 24 junior colleges. As Mother Grace Dammann, president of Manhattanville College wrote succinctly in 1942:

The fundamental reason, however, which was at the base of all these enterprises from 1899 to today was the desire to afford Catholic girls a Catholic atmosphere during college years and to save them from the dangers to their faith which many were meeting in secular colleges.⁴

This rapid growth led to certain problems. Mary Oates remarks that in the 1930s, average enrollment was under 300 students; in 1938, only 1 in 5 colleges was accredited nationally by the Association of American Colleges; and in the 1940s, 1 in 5 students was a nun at graduation. The eagerness of orders to establish colleges imbued by the particular spirit of that congregation led to a proliferation of colleges in some cities, which all competed for funding and students. Their small size and lack of funds restricted the number of courses that these colleges were able to offer, particularly in the natural and social sciences. At the same time, they attempted to fulfill a dual purpose of preparing suitable Catholic wives and providing vocational training, primarily for teachers, leading to a narrow and traditional curriculum. Women religious, who

⁴Mother Grace Damian, "The American Catholic College for Women," in Roy Deferrari, ed., *Catholic Education in the United States*, 1942, p. 180.

made up most of the faculty in the early years, were often ill-trained and overburdened by responsibilities.⁵

In fact, Oates divides Catholic women's colleges into two tiers: a small group of elite institutions that aspired to the academic standards and curriculum and faculty of the non-sectarian Eastern women's colleges; and the majority, local colleges which provided vocational courses for a primarily working-class clientele. Among the superior colleges were Trinity College; Manhattanville; the College of New Rochelle; St. Mary's College in Notre Dame; the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota; and St. Teresa's College in Winona, Minnesota. These colleges had the support of liberal bishops and, more importantly, were led by women committed to academic excellence. These college presidents who encouraged their Sisters to enroll in Ph.D. programs and sought the aid of lay faculty. Lacking such visionary leaders, the less prestigious colleges nevertheless performed an important function by providing a low-cost education for local women, often the daughters of immigrants, who could not have afforded the elite Catholic women's colleges.

All Catholic women's colleges shared a Catholic atmosphere, characterized by the presence of nuns on campus, religious rituals and observances, the prominence of religious-inspired art and architecture, and generally stricter regulations than the non-sectarian women's colleges. Religion was an important part of the curriculum, and religious clubs and societies were important extra-curricular activities. A survey in the early 1930s found that hours of rising and retiring were regulated, mass was voluntary but encouraged, visiting hours were

⁵Mary J. Oates, "Introduction," to *A History of Higher Education for Catholic Women* (New York, 1987).

limited, and chaperones required. Some colleges even required students to wear uniforms.⁶ Philosophy, the “handmaiden of religion” was deemed the most important subject, and history and political science emphasized Catholic themes, including, for example, courses on Irish history and on the Crusades.⁷ The most popular extra-curricular activities were religious organizations such as the Sodality of the Children of Mary, the League of the Sacred Heart, the Mission Crusade, and Catholic Action.⁸

During the 1950s, the Catholic women’s colleges were influenced by the Sister Formation Movement. This movement, inaugurated in 1954, sought to improve the education and training of women religious for their ministries. Previously sisters often went to college on the “twenty-year plan,” studying during the summers while spending the rest of the year teaching or performing their duties. Among the leaders of the movement were college educators and administrators from the National Catholic Education Association’s women’s college section, notably Sister M. Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C. of St. Mary’s College.⁹ This movement led to arrangements for novices to attend Catholic women’s colleges as well the foundation of 49 “sister colleges” between 1955 and 1965, many of which eventually admitted lay students as well.

The Sister Formation movement has been seen as a prologue to the changes which swept the Catholic church in the 1960s, ultimately transforming both the Church and the place of

⁶Sister Mary Mariella Bowler, *A History of Catholic Colleges for Women in the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., 1933), p. 87.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 102-107.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁹Beane, Marjorie Noterman, *From Framework to Freedom: A History of the Sister Formation Conference* (Lanham, MD, 1993),

women within it. In 1965, the Second Vatican Council ended, resulting in a call for modernization of the liturgy, greater ecumenism, and expanded roles for the laity. At the women's colleges, these trends were reflected by increased involvement of the laity in college government, leading to the gradual transfer of control from religious communities to lay boards of trustees. Although lay involvement predated the 1960s, during this period, it became increasingly obvious that the much-needed loans and grants to fund expansion would be easier to obtain if the colleges were no longer the property of religious orders. Only Webster and Manhattanville Colleges, however, totally broke off ties with their founding communities and with the Catholic church.¹⁰

During the 1970s, the Catholic women's colleges faced declining numbers, as many Catholic men's colleges and universities began to accept women. Crises in funding and student unrest often resulted. To meet these challenges many colleges introduced accelerated programs and evening classes to attract students. They also reached out to minorities and in many cases admitted men students. Some colleges closed or merged with larger institutions. The remaining colleges somewhat lost their "appearance of Catholicism," as the dwindling numbers of sisters were increasingly replaced by lay faculty members and those remaining often stopped wearing religious habits. In 1983, there were about 35 four-year Catholic women's colleges in the United States, and today, according to statistics maintained by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU), there are 29.¹¹ In 1978, however, a small group of colleges and universities founded by congregations of women religious that were members of the ACCU

¹⁰Alice Gallin, O.S.U. *Independence and a New Partnership in Catholic Higher Education* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

¹¹The ACCU maintains a website at <http://www.accunet.org>.

formed the Neylan Commission, with the aim of enhancing the work of these institutions and fostering collaborative enterprises among them. Today the Neylan Commission numbers 118 colleges and universities. The original goal statement read “As a group of administrators in Catholic college settings, we propose to position ourselves in such a way as to be able to contribute to shaping the changing role of women, the emerging forms of ministry in the church, and the changing forms of higher education and in so doing to gain national visibility for Catholic higher education with a particular mission for women.”¹²

Bibliographic Survey

Work on Catholic higher education has tended to focus on the vexed question of academic freedom at Catholic institutions rather than on historical analysis. In his recent synthesis, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Philip Gleason comments that Catholic higher education has “attracted virtually no attention from historians.”¹³ His own work provides a valuable overview of the period, but, as he admits, he does not attempt to deal systematically with student life or put the study in the context of other sectors of American higher education. Although the endnotes provide many useful references to little-known college histories, dissertations and other secondary works, his discussion of Catholic women’s colleges is relatively brief. He does, however, refer to individual women’s colleges in his general discussion of the response of Catholic institutions to post-war pressures, such as the drive to integrate African American students, experimentation with the curriculum, and the debate over standards.

¹²The web site address of the Neylan commission is <http://www.accunet.org/Neylan>

¹³Gleason, “Preface,” p. vii.

Edward J. Power's classic *A History of Catholic Higher Education in the United States* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1958), updated as *Catholic Higher Education in America: A History* (New York: Meredith Corporation) in 1972, devotes a separate chapter to women's colleges. Power traces them from their origins in nineteenth century girls' academies, to the 1950s, basing his analysis chiefly on college catalogs and histories, particularly Mary B. Syron's *A History of Four Catholic Women's Colleges* (Detroit: University of Detroit, 1956). He includes some comparisons with Catholic men's colleges, commenting, for example, that it was easier for Catholic women's colleges to introduce new subjects such as foreign languages than it was for the Jesuit-dominated men's colleges and universities. In general, however, Power takes a dim view of Catholic women's colleges:

Fate, sometimes friendly, allowed a few Catholic women's colleges to become highly effective institutions. For others, if we read the historical record correctly, it remained fickle and withheld both distinction and effectiveness.¹⁴

Power contends that Catholic women's college faculty were poorly trained and tended to teach by rote, while the administrators were isolated from secular educational and managerial trends and obsessed by discipline. Although he mentions briefly improvements in faculty status in the 1960s, he does little justice to the changes this period brought.

In fact, in the 1960s, the impact of Vatican II led to extensive self-examination by many Catholic institutions and a corresponding flurry of studies by sociologists. The distinguished sociologist Father Andrew M. Greeley, also known as a writer of mystery novels, published *From Backwater to Mainstream: A Profile of Catholic Higher Education* (New York: McGraw Hill) in 1969, as part of a series sponsored by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education.

¹⁴Power, *Catholic Higher Education in America*, p. 313.

Based on interviews, statistics and descriptive surveys, Greeley tried to make generalizations about the goals, functions, results and problems of Catholic institutions. In a similar vein was Robert Hassenger's collection, *The Shape of Catholic Higher Education* (University of Chicago Press, 1967). Hassenger assembled the most significant published and unpublished research on Catholic higher education of the period in an attempt to answer the question "what is Catholic about a Catholic college?" Of particular interest was Hassenger's portrait of the fictitiously named Mary College, a college founded for local women of modest means, later identified as Mundelein College in Chicago. As part of an intensive self-study process, Mundelein conducted questionnaires of its students and alumnae, including questions on ethnic origins, socio-economic status, motivation for attending college, religious affiliation and practices, and educational background. The self-study, led by Sister Ann Ida Gannon, B.V.M., also examined the composition and training of the faculty, coming to some startling conclusions: for example, the religious faculty was found to be more liberal than the lay faculty, while there was more of a division between older and younger professors than between lay and religious faculty.¹⁵ The self-study eventually led to the restructuring of the college.

Similarly, mainstream work on the history of women's education has not devoted much attention to Catholic women's colleges. The standard work in this area, Barbara Solomon's *In the Company of Educated Women* (New Haven, 1985), briefly discusses the origins and rapid growth of Catholic women's colleges in the first half of the twentieth century, placing them in the context of the debate over what constitutes a liberal education for Catholic women. In her early classic, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* (Washington, D.C.: Zenger, 1959), Mabel Newcomer omits mostly Catholic women's colleges from the discussion, although

¹⁵Hassenger, p. 99.

she does incorporate them into her statistics, noting that in 1956-1957, private four-year Roman Catholic women's colleges enrolled 42,900 students¹⁶, and that in 1957, Catholic women's colleges accounted for approximately half of women's institutions.¹⁷

Newcomer's work focuses, however, on the elite Northeastern women's colleges, as do more recent specialized studies such as Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz' *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's colleges from their Nineteenth Century Beginnings to the 1930s*, 2nd ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), a study of women's college architecture that does not mention Catholic colleges at all; and Patricia Palmieri's work on Wellesley.¹⁸ Indeed as Margaret Dittmore and Susan Tucker point out, histories of women's higher education "have focused primarily on the leadership of Northeastern institutions (especially the role of the Seven Sister colleges) and the coeducational institutions of the Midwest....Until recent years, most scholars of education have focused on the most successful or the biggest failures from the various women's colleges or coeducational institutions. The past of the average woman student, or even the average faculty member, was not emphasized."¹⁹ The students and faculty of Catholic women's colleges are among those who have been excluded.

The history of the elementary and secondary education of Catholic girls, which affected a far greater sector of the population than did Catholic women's colleges, has not received much

¹⁶Office of Education, *Biennial Statistics of Education* as quoted in Newcomer, p. 49.

¹⁷Newcomer, p. 37.

¹⁸Patricia Palmieri, "Here was Fellowship," *History of Education Quarterly* 23 (1983).

¹⁹Preface to *The Higher Education of Women in the South: An Annotated Bibliography*. Margaret Dittmore and Susan Tucker, comps. *Archival and Bibliographic Series III* (Newcomb College Center for Research on Women. New Orleans, Louisiana, 1992)

attention either. An exception is Eileen Mary Brewer's *Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women, 1860-1920* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987), which is a study of private Catholic girls' high schools run by four orders of nuns. Using community archives and literary sources, Brewer analyzes curriculum and student life at these "convent schools," as well as the values of their leaders, trying to reconstruct the process of training the Catholic gentlewoman. Mary J. Oates, a professor at Regis College in Weston, Massachusetts, has looked at the training and work of Catholic sisters at charitable and educational institutions in "Organized Voluntarism: The Catholic Sister in Massachusetts, 1870-1940," published in *Women and Power in American History: A Reader* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1991) and in her "Professional Preparation of Parochial School Teachers, 1870-1940," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 12 (January 1984: 60-72). Similarly, in her dissertation "Beyond the Immigrant Church: The Catholic Sub-Culture and the Parishes of Rochester, New York, 1870-1920" (Unpublished dissertation, Cornell University, 1994), Elizabeth Milliken discusses the work of sisters in parish schools and other community institutions in the context of the creation of social and feminine cultural identities. Both Oates and Milliken found community archives to be a rich source of information about the working life of sisters.

Existing historical studies of Catholic women's colleges fall into three types: comparative studies, works on individual colleges, and biographical profiles. One of the best of any type was written in 1933. Sister Mary Mariella Bowler of the Sisters of St. Francis in Glen Riddle, Pennsylvania was the author of a Catholic University Ph.D. dissertation, *A History of Catholic Colleges for Women in the United States of America*, which was published by Catholic University as part of a Department of Education series on Catholic education. Bowler used the

archives of eighteen Catholic women's colleges from throughout the country, including Immaculate Heart in Hollywood, California; Rosary in River Forest, Illinois; Ursuline College in New Orleans; and Webster College in Missouri. She also studied the catalogs of all 74 Catholic women's colleges in existence in 1930, as well as numerous periodicals, directories, government documents, church and order histories, and other primary and secondary sources. She provided statistics about accreditation, funding, the educational background and careers of graduates and qualifications of faculty, as well as analyzing curriculum, discipline and student life.

A more recent comparative study is Tracy Beth Mitrano's "The Rise and the Fall of Catholic Women's Higher Education in New York State, 1890-1985 (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1989). Mitrano's study encompassed thirteen Catholic women's colleges and former women's colleges. Although she claimed that her study was "the first monograph on Catholic women's higher education informed by contemporary historiography,"²⁰ she struggled to fit her data into four phases of development: the imitative phase (1900-1918), when Catholic institutions copied mainstream higher education; the adolescent phase (1918-1939), when they retrenched culturally; the mature phase (1939-1965), the highest level of development; and the disintegrative phase, (1965-1985.) Mitrano's dissertation is most useful for her extensive sources.

The second type, histories of individual colleges, includes both published works and dissertations. Many of the published histories were commissioned by the colleges, usually written for an important anniversary with an alumnae audience in mind. A typical example is Sister Mary Immaculate Creek, C.S.C.'s, *A Panorama 1844-1977: Saint Mary's College Notre Dame, Indiana* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1977). Although full of useful information and based on

²⁰Mitrano, p. 12.

primary sources, Creek's account is relentlessly positive in tone, skimming over a period of campus unrest leading to the termination of the college's president in 1967. In contrast is historian and Chestnut Hill College Professor John Lukacs' lively and well-written *A Sketch of the History of Chestnut Hill College, 1924-1974* (Chestnut Hill College, 1975). Lukacs analyzes the development of the college in the context of social and political change, focusing on the upheavals of the late 1960s, when the college began to lose its traditional clientele, the upper-middle class largely Irish-Catholic young women of the Northern Philadelphia suburbs, to coeducational institutions. This development led college to expand its part-time and evening programs, accept married students, and increasingly attract Hispanic women and students from public and diocesan schools as opposed to private academies. Another useful work is Sister Columba Mullaly, S.N.D.'s rather discursive *Trinity College Washington, D.C.: The First Eighty Years*. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1987). This 581 page work is rich with detail and illuminates the range of sources in the college archives.

Several dissertations approach the history of Catholic women's colleges more analytically. Mary Friel, S.N.D., based her Boston College dissertation "History of Emmanuel College, 1919-1974"(1980) on thirty or forty interviews with faculty members, administrators, students and alumnae, as well as the college archives. She places the college's development in the context of the ethnic enclaves of early twentieth century Boston from which it emerged, as well as the influence of the founding Congregation, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Tracy Schier, who like Friel was a student of Edward Power's at Boston College, entitled her dissertation "History of Higher Education for Women at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods: 1840-1980"(1987). Like Friel, Schier bases her history of the Indiana college on oral histories,

the college archives, and the archives of the founding Sisters of Providence. Her thesis explores how three factors—Catholicity, liberal arts orientation, and commitment to women shaped the college’s curriculum and student life. A final example of this type of work is Jean R. Seaton, “The Impact of Changing Sex Roles on Higher Education for Women: The Case of Ursuline College (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation: Case Western Reserve University, 1982). Seaton places her history of Ursuline College, the first chartered women’s college in Ohio, in the context of women’s changing role in society, and of developments in women’s higher education in general. Both Seaton and Schier extend their analyses of demographic and structural change at their respective institutions into the 1970s. Tracy Mitrano also notes that as well as these more recent works, the Catholic University library contains hundreds of histories of Catholic communities and institutions written by women religious who did graduate study work under the eminent church historian John Tracy Ellis during the 1940s and 1950s.²¹ College archives also often possess in-house chronicles.

Biographical works on college founders, presidents and leading faculty members constitute a third type of study of Catholic women’s colleges. An excellent recent example of this genre is Humanistic Studies Professor Gail Porter Mandell’s *Madeleva: A Biography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). Sister M. Madeleva Wolff, C.S.C. (1887-1964) was a poet, college president, and leading Catholic intellectual who befriended J.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Thomas Merton, Clare Booth Luce, and others. Based on extensive archival research and interviews, Mandell traces the influences of Wolff’s early life in Wisconsin and her education to her presidency of St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame. Sister Madeleva was the author of twenty published books, including thirteen volumes of religious poetry and an

²¹Mitrano, p. 11.

autobiography, *My First Seventy Years* (New York: Macmillan, 1959). She attended St. Mary's College first as a student in 1906, and began teaching there shortly after graduation. The biography is rich in details about student life at St. Mary's during these years, as well as Sister Madeleva's many innovations during her tenure as president (1934-1961), most notably the founding of the School of Sacred Theology at St. Mary's, the first of its kind for women and laymen, in 1943.

An earlier example of a biographical approach is Sister Angela Elizabeth Keenan, S.N.D., *Three Against the Wind: The Founding of Trinity College Washington, D.C.* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1973). Using correspondence and autobiographical writings, Keenan discusses the early history of Trinity College in the context of a joint biography of the two founders, Sister Julia McGroarty and Sister Mary Euphrasia Taylor, as well as the influential early president, Sister Raphael Pike. Similarly, in her essay "The Founding Years of Trinity College Washington, D.C.: A Case Study in Christian Feminism." *U.S. Catholic Historian* (1991), Mary Hayes, S.N.D. analyzes whether the Trinity founders were influenced by nineteenth century feminism. Karen Kennelly, C.S.J. also uses a biographical approach in the essay "Mary Molloy, Women's College Founder," originally published in Barbara Stuhler and Gretchen Kreuter, eds., *Women of Minnesota* (Minnesota Historical Society, 1979.) Mary Molloy (1880-1954) was unusual in that she was a Cornell-educated lay woman who was invited in 1907 by the Sisters of St. Francis in Winona, Minnesota to initiate colleges courses for the community. Under Molloy's leadership, the original Winona Academy evolved into the present College of St. Teresa, incorporated in 1912. Mary Molloy entered the religious community after the death of her father in 1922.

Women's colleges were unique in that they gave women opportunities for leadership available in few other fields. Cynthia Farr Brown's dissertation "Leading Women: Female Leadership in Women's Higher Education, 1880-1940" (Brandeis University, 1992) analyzes leadership using four prominent women's colleges – two secular, Bryn Mawr and Wellesley; and two Catholic, Trinity and the College of New Rochelle – as case studies. Using leadership theory and exploring the issues of gender and power, Brown demonstrates how in the period before 1940, leadership at all these institutions shifted from the centralized and personal to a more decentralized model in which many constituencies participated in decision-making. She also found that unlike at the secular institutions, at the Catholic colleges, women's leadership and the value of a single-sex education were not questioned during this period. Mary Ellen Klein uses a similar approach in her dissertation "Sister M. Madeleva Wolff, CSC, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana: A Study of Presidential Leadership 1934-1961," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Kent State University, 1983). Unlike Gail Mandell, Klein focuses exclusively on Wolff's leadership of St. Mary's, demonstrating how during her tenure she moved from total control of faculty, curriculum, and college life to the delegation of many duties, for example, forming the first Board of Lay Trustees in 1956.

In her anthology, *A History of Higher Education for Catholic Women* (New York: Garland, 1987), Mary J. Oates includes many of the writings on the works (Power, Hassenger, Kennelly) discussed here, as well as an eclectic group of published documents including examples of the early debate over higher education for Catholic women, excerpts from college catalogs, reminiscences of students and faculty, criticism and defense of Catholic women's colleges from the Catholic press, and lectures by Catholic women's college leaders such as

Mother Grace Dammann, RSCJ; Mother Pauline O'Neill CSC; Sister Madeleva Wolff, CSC; and Mary Molloy. The collection also contains a thoughtful introduction and an extremely useful bibliography.

Archival Resources:

Research on the history of Catholic women's colleges depends, of course, on the existence and accessibility of archival resources. To date, no survey has been done of the archives of Catholic women's colleges and former women's colleges similar to Sr. Evangeline Thomas' *Women Religious History Sources: A Guide to Repositories in the United States* (Bowker, 1983). Under the sponsorship of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Thomas surveyed the archival holdings of 569 congregations. Admittedly, this process would be difficult for Catholic women's colleges, since so many have closed or merged with other institutions. The more ephemeral junior colleges and sisters' colleges are particularly hard to trace. In 1963, there were 76 Catholic junior colleges, many of which were women's colleges, including the Sister Formation colleges.²² For instance, Alphonsus Junior College in Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey, founded in 1961, only existed until about 1973. Some colleges such as Mundelein, which merged with Loyola University of Chicago in 1991, have maintained their archives within the parent institution, but others have disappeared into oblivion. In her research for her doctoral dissertation, Tracy Mitrano found that of the thirteen New York colleges in her study, only two, Manhattanville and Marymount, had archives organized in a formal fashion. Of the three colleges which had closed, she found the remains of Notre Dame College in Staten Island at St. John's University, which took over its campus; all that remained of Holy Rosary

²²Sister Mary Jerome Danese, SS.J. *The Catholic Junior Colleges in the United States* (Catholic University of America Press, 1964).

(now Daemen college in Amherst, New York) was a history written by one of the Sisters and some pamphlets, while all that was left Ladycliff was two cardboard boxes of documents at the sponsoring community's convent in Peekskill, New York.²³

I visited the archives of two colleges, Chestnut Hill College in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, and Marymount Manhattan College in New York City; and spoke by telephone or received written information from the archivists of six other colleges. Although it is impossible to draw conclusions from such a small sample, my research suggested certain common themes. Many archives were only founded recently—Chestnut Hill and Marymount Manhattan in 1986 and Rosemont in Rosemont, Pennsylvania in 1991. The staffing level, funding, physical resources, function and accessibility of these archives covered a wide range—from Alverno College in Milwaukee, which has a full-time professional archivist and records management program to Rosemont College, where the archives is staffed two days a week by a retired volunteer alumna. Most of these archives, however, are small, with limited funding and physical space, are staffed by part-time archivists and student helpers, and perform a limited records management function. Although they primarily serve the college communities, they are open to outside researchers. Restrictions follow standard practices of other academic institutions, such as a 20 year closing period on administrative records. Indeed these archives appear similar to those of other small non-sectarian colleges, with perhaps, an advantage in that they benefit from the volunteer labor of retired Sisters. The archivists with whom I spoke all appeared to be making heroic efforts to solicit material, make their collections more accessible, and develop themselves professionally.

In fact, I discovered valuable source material and documentation projects at these

²³Mitrano, p. 21.

archives. For example, the Sisters affiliated with Rosemont College carefully preserved Annals, records of daily events on campus similar to those routinely kept by religious orders, from 1925 to the late 1960s, which are now in the college's archives. The archives at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana contain handwritten ledgers of admissions dating from 1844, when the college was founded as a girls' academy, as well as 10,000 photographs, including the collection of Dympra Volvach, who photographed the college as a student from 1908 to 1916, as well as documenting every reunion of her aging class until 1973. St. Mary's, of course, holds the papers of Sister Madeleva Wolff, which include manuscripts, correspondence and photographs. Documenting more recent history is Marymount Manhattan College, which holds the papers of a distinguished alumnae, Geraldine Ferraro '56; and Carlow College in Pittsburgh, which holds the records of the Carlow Hill College, a branch in Pittsburgh's impoverished Hill district, which originated in classes for employees at Mercy Hospital.

New Research and Suggestions for Further Study

Although much of the work discussed on the history of Catholic women's colleges is unpublished, out-of-print, out-of-date, or difficult to access, at present several new projects are underway which will help create a new understanding of the history of Catholic Women's colleges. The Lilly Foundation is funding a book on student life at Catholic women's colleges, with contributions from ten writers from across the nation. David R. Contosta of Chestnut Hill College is writing a chapter comparing Rosemont, Chestnut Hill, and Immaculata, a neighboring college. Mary Jeremy Daigler, R.S.M., is about to complete a book on the history of Mercy higher education in the United States. (The Sisters of Mercy founded 29 and currently sponsor 20 colleges in the country, the largest number by any Roman Catholic religious community apart

from the Jesuits.) Sandra Yocum Mize, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Dayton, is doing research on the Graduate School of Sacred Theology at St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, attempting to identify graduates and trace subsequent careers.

Lois Cherepon and Barbara Peltzman of St. John's University's Staten Island campus (the former Notre Dame College) have been studying Catholic women's colleges in the Northeast, and gave an, as yet, unpublished paper, "The Voices of the Foundress," to a conference of the National Association of Women in Catholic Higher Education in 1996. The Association is now considering an oral history project. The recent History of Women Religious Conference at Loyola University in Chicago in June 1998 included a paper on the impact of the social forces of the sixties on certain women's colleges in the Seton/Vincentian tradition. In April 2000, the Center for Spirituality at St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, is sponsoring a panel on the prognosis for Catholic women's education in the 21st century.

Many possible avenues for further research remain, however. There is a particular need for studies of the interplay of gender, religion, class and ethnicity at the Catholic women's college similar to Margaret Susan Thompson's work on religious orders. One way these factors could be illuminated is through study of the distinctively religious and feminine architecture and material culture of Catholic women's colleges, as Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz has done for secular women's colleges. This technique has been used effectively to study Canadian religious orders, in Elizabeth W. McGahan's "Inside the Hallowed Walls: Convent Life through Material History" Material History Bulletin/Bulletin d'Histoire de la Culture Materielle 25 (Spring/Printemps 1987) and Tania Marie Martin, "Housing the Grey Nuns: Power, Religion and Women in Fin-de-siecle Montreal" (Master of Architecture Thesis, McGill University, 1995).

Many archives contain collections of artifacts and some colleges maintain small museums. Another area which has been neglected is the role of the Sisters who taught or worked as administrators at the Catholic women's colleges. Little is known about these women, apart from the contributions of such luminaries as Sister Madeleva Wolff. The first yearbook of Chestnut Hill (then Mount Saint Joseph) College (1929) does not mention the faculty at all, while a 1948 Marymount Manhattan yearbook identifies them only as Religious of the Sacred Heart. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Sisters on the faculties of the "non-elite" colleges (a problematic concept in itself) were better-educated than historians have assumed. It might be rewarding to do an empirical survey of college catalogs. Finally, there is a great need to update the history of Catholic women's higher education to include the changes of the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed several colleges are currently preparing new histories for upcoming anniversaries. Research in these areas would place the history of these colleges firmly in the social history of the twentieth century and make known the contribution they made to the lives of thousands of young women.