

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Villa Maria Academy

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 819 West 8th Street N/A not for publication

city or town Erie N/A vicinity

state Pennsylvania code PA county Erie code 049 zip code 16505

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State of Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Villa Maria Academy
Name of Property

Erie County, Pennsylvania
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
0		sites
0		structures
0		objects
2	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/church-related residence

RELIGION/church school

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th AND 20th CENTURY REVIVALS/

Late Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls brick

stone

roof asphalt

other wood cornice, terra cotta trim,

slate roof

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Villa Maria Academy
Name of Property

Erie County, Pennsylvania
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Education

Period of Significance

1892-1946

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Significant Dates

1892

1904

1927

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Dean, David K. & Sons (1892)

Hecker, F.F. (1904)

Fuller and Stickle (1927)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Sisters of Saint Joseph, Erie County
Historical Society

Villa Maria Academy
Name of Property

Erie County, Pennsylvania
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.5 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	1	7
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 Zone

5	7	4	2	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Easting

4	4	6	3	3	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 Northing

2

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

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3

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 Zone

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 Easting

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 Northing

4

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cynthia Rose/Associate and Kristin Justham/Researcher

organization Noble Preservation Services, Inc. date 10/18/95 revised 5/20/96

street & number 10 Log House Road telephone (215) 679-5110

city or town Zionsville state PA zip code 18092

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Richard Barnhart/Villa Maria Housing Partnership

street & number One Liberty Place/1650 Market St./Suite 3910 telephone (215) 979-1100

city or town Philadelphia state PA zip code 19103

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1601-0018).

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Villa Maria Academy, Erie County, Pennsylvania

Section number 7 Page 1

The Villa Maria Academy is a pair of brick school buildings with a connector between them constructed in the Late Victorian, Late Victorian Gothic and Late Gothic Revival styles and built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the City of Erie, Pennsylvania. Sited on a flat, two acre parcel of land in Erie's south side, the academy grounds are laid in a conventional arrangement with small lawn areas containing trees and shrubs located between the buildings and the streets and an open courtyard planted with grass to the rear. Concrete walkways which intersect in a central hub lead to the building entrances. A variety of trees and low-lying shrubs dot the landscape. Delineating the property's boundaries is a Late Victorian style iron fence with a decorative gate. The success of the facility is directly reflected in the growth of the academy within its first thirty-five years. In 1892 the original building was completed and continued enrollment prompted the construction of massive additions in 1904 and in 1927. The buildings stand with a high degree of integrity, reflecting the prosperity of the residents of the City of Erie and the success of the academy. Overall, the academy retains the essential characteristics that define the Late Victorian, Late Victorian Gothic and Late Gothic Revival architectural styles and stands as an important institutional landmark in its community. The academy occupies an entire city block in a residential neighborhood developed between ca. 1890 and ca. 1930. Surrounding buildings are constructed in brick and frame and are generally two and two and one-half stories, designed in the Late Victorian and Colonial Revival architectural styles.

David K. Dean & Sons of Erie designed the original building, known as the motherhouse, which was dedicated in 1892. Rising two and one-half stories from its raised rusticated stone foundation to its gable roof, the original building is built of red brick with red terra cotta trim and detailing. While the style would best be characterized as Late Victorian, features such as the towers with pointed arch openings are representative of the High Victorian Gothic style. Original one-over-one sashes organized in single bays or grouped in threes or fours remain, although some are replacements. A wide Romanesque Revival style arched opening denotes the entrance location and bears the words, "Villa Maria." The roofline is rather complex with a long gable paralleling 8th Street intersected by a large cross gable to the east. Gabled dormers and two conical roof turrets penetrate the roofline. The side and rear elevations continue the overall design themes, but with diminished detailing due to their secondary orientation. Smaller brick one and two story additions have been added to the rear.

Overcrowding was a problem within the first decade and construction of a large addition had become imperative. F.F. Hecker, a Pittsburgh architectural firm, was commissioned to design this addition which was completed in 1904. The addition abuts the original building to the east with the connecting section stepped back in order to avoid the infilling of the window openings on the side elevation of the original section. With the success of the original design, the scale,

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massing and materials were generally continued on the 1904 addition. Some changes were made to the fenestration and detailing, a result of both the interior spacial requirements and the changing trends in architecture at the turn of the century. The two most prominent characteristics of the addition are the parapet walls; the first at the second story projecting bay, which is a highly decorative terra cotta band containing Gothic symbols; and the second, a crenelated Gothic-inspired parapet, crowning the third story. An additional modification in the design of this addition is the increased size of the window openings, a reflection of the changing trends in architecture. On the main elevation, the first floor windows are vertically stacked to accommodate the need for additional light in the auditorium.

While the front section of this addition is topped by a flat roof, the massive rear section is roofed in a hipped configuration with hipped roof dormers. This three and one-half story rear section is of significantly greater massing, spanning a distance of fifteen registers. One-over-one sashes, organized in single bays or groups of three provide the fenestration. A one-story enclosed sun-porch projects from the center bay of the side elevation. This is topped by a bracketed cornice, mimicking the upper cornice. A modern metal fire escape and modern doors have been added to the rear. All other alterations to this 1904 section have been minimal.

Gannon Hall was constructed in 1927 to accommodate a college curriculum. A two-story bridge connects Gannon Hall to the original building. This bridge contains a wide arched opening at the ground level which allows vehicles to pass through to the courtyard for delivery and maintenance purposes. This building was designed in the Late Gothic Revival architectural style, but continues the overall massing established on the earlier buildings with some modifications. This gable roof building rises three and one-half stories over a raised basement. The gable ridge parallels 8th Street on the main elevation, and a long cross gable runs the length of the building along Plum Street. Stepped gabled dormers provide light to the upper floor. The brick differs notably from the earlier builds and is a brownish red brick with some black bricks laid in a Flemish bond. Diamond patterning adorns the wide gables. Fenestration is provided by various configurations of steel casement sashes, generally paired, and surrounded by wide cast stone surrounds. The entrance doors are wooden with glass lights and contain carved pointed arch motifs. The doors are also surrounded by wide cast stone surrounds. The chapel section to the south continues the same design characteristics but the higher style is noted by the stained glass windows, conical roof tower over the sanctuary and the pointed buttresses. Examination of historic photographs reveals that Gannon Hall originally contained elaborately detailed masonry door surrounds with spiked finials. These were removed at an unknown date. In addition, the chapel's buttresses were also crowned by these tall, spiked finials. Low masonry walls with Gothic detailing once formed gathering spaces at the building's entrances. These masonry walls have been replaced with modern rails. While the removal of these

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decorative elements had a significant effect on the appearance of the building, Gannon Hall retains the overall form and the necessary details such as the brickwork, stepped gabled dormers and original steel casement windows and wooden doors to convey its Late Gothic Revival architectural style.

The motherhouse and the 1904 motherhouse addition appear and function as one building. A centered double loaded corridor bisects the motherhouse on the east-west axis. This corridor continues into the 1904 addition stepping around the auditorium. The main entrance stair of the motherhouse contains a wooden balustrade with intricately carved balusters and newel post. Paneled wainscotting runs along the wall. The main stair in the 1904 addition is similar, though less elaborate. This stair contains beaded board wainscotting, carved newel posts and a sweeping terminus design. Principal interior spaces in the addition include the auditorium, gymnasium, dining room, chapel and several parlors. The first floor corridor in the motherhouse contains a linoleum floor, plaster walls and ceiling with a cove molding, paneled wainscotting and paneled doors and door jambs. Less elaborate beaded board wainscotting lines the walls of the 1904 addition. The corridors in this later section contain linoleum floors, plaster walls and ceiling, and wooden picture rail and door and transom surrounds.

The auditorium remains in its original condition, for the most part, with the most significant alteration being the installation of modern seating. The walls are plaster with decorative pilasters containing corinthian capitals. Paneled wainscotting extends from beneath the stage around the room. The proscenium arch is a plaster molding with a wide rounded profile.

Beneath the auditorium, on the ground floor, is the gymnasium. This space primarily contains modern features and finishes but retains its original beaded board ceiling. Large supporting columns, periodically spaced throughout, and the low ceiling height indicate that this space was likely not originally designed as a gymnasium. Sisters of St. Joseph historian, Sr. Urmann, SSJ, has indicated that prior to the 1920s, though not necessarily originally, this room was used for general exercises, running and jumping rope. In the 1920s it was used for roller skating. Eventually it was divided into a carpenter shop and storage space. After World War II it was converted into a classroom to help ease overcrowded classes in Gannon Hall. In 1986 it was reverted back into an exercise room.

Also on the ground floor is the dining room. This space is a rectangular space with linoleum floor, plaster walls and a pressed metal ceiling embossed with intricate designs.

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One of the more elaborate spaces in Gannon Hall is the entrance hall, located near the main entrance off of the courtyard. The tile flooring is continued in this space. The walls are plaster which are scored to simulate large, smooth stone blocks. Ornate light fixtures hang from the molded plaster ceiling. An elaborately molded plaster entrance surround leads to the library, although the entrance has been infilled.

At the south end of Gannon Hall is the College Chapel, the most elaborately finished space in the academy. The formality of this space is lavishly expressed in the ornately carved wooden tracery surrounds, the plaster ceiling with hexagonal and octagonal panels and the complex sanctuary dome with exposed wooden truss and stained glass windows. As in the entrance hall, the walls in the chapel are plaster, scored to simulate stone.

The upper floors of Gannon Hall contain corridors with linoleum and carpeted flooring and plaster and drywall walls and ceilings. Some of the original doors to the dormitory rooms survive and some modern doors have been added. The dormitory rooms generally contain carpeted floors and plaster or drywall walls and ceilings. A main living area is located on the second floor. This space contains plaster walls with moldings that create a paneled effect. A fireplace stands to one end with a wooden mantle typical of the Colonial Revival period.

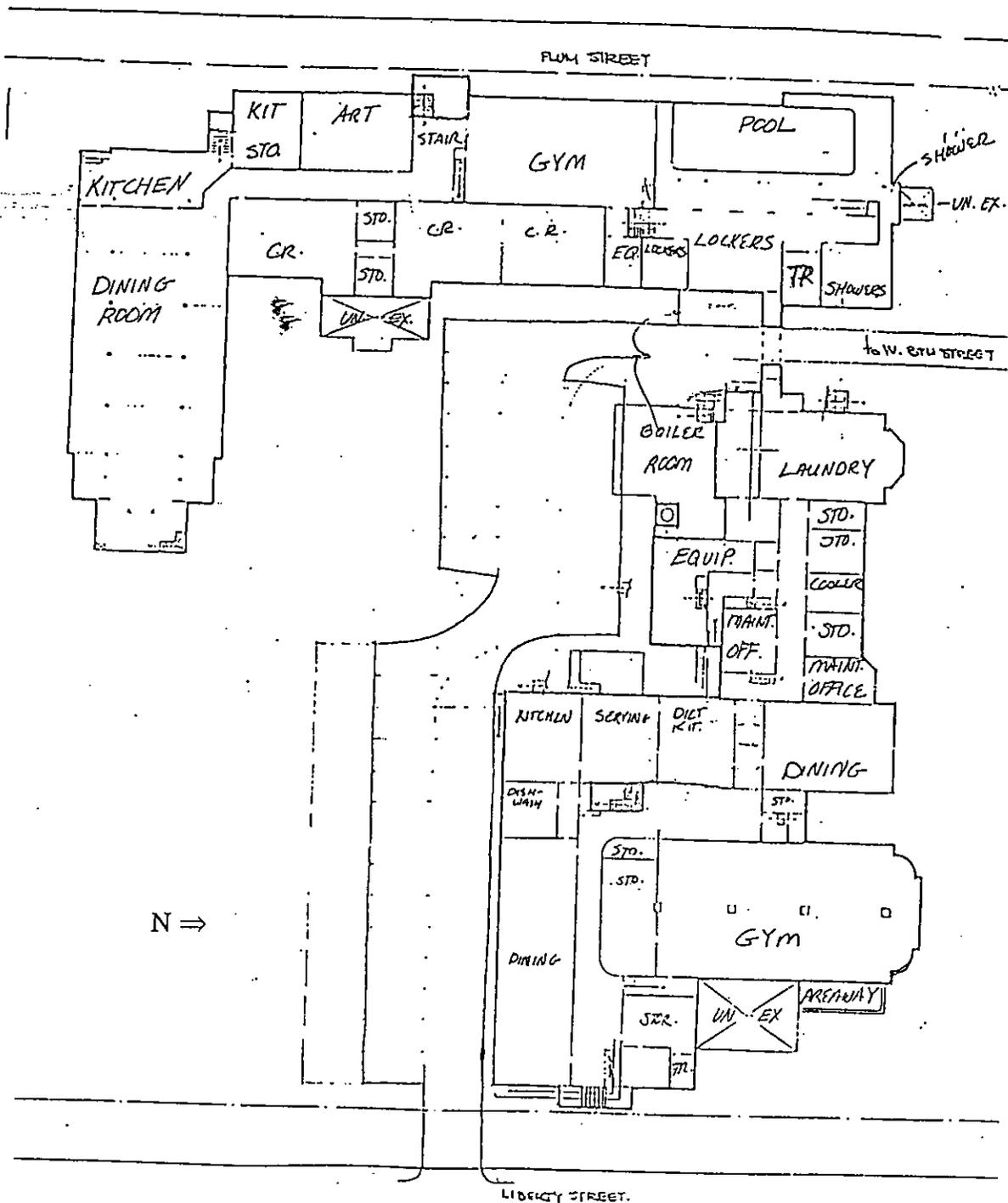
The buildings that comprise the Villa Maria Academy survive remarkably intact from their original period of construction with minimal alterations to the original fabric, particularly in the main public spaces. The form and detailing of the buildings stand as superb examples of the Late Victorian, Late Victorian Gothic and Late Gothic Revival architectural styles and remain with a high degree of integrity in excellent condition.

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GROUND (BASEMENT) FLOOR PLAN

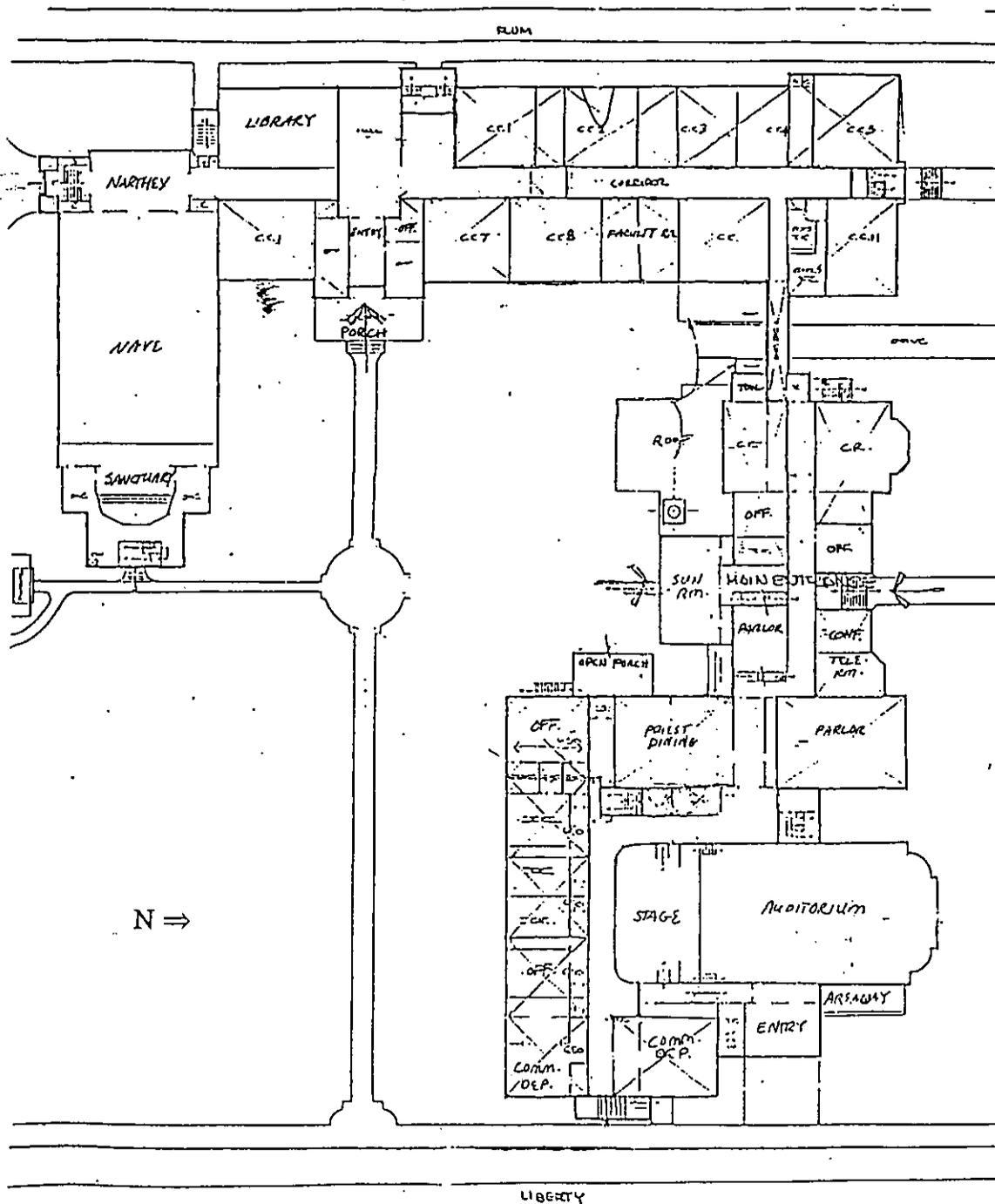


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FIRST FLOOR PLAN

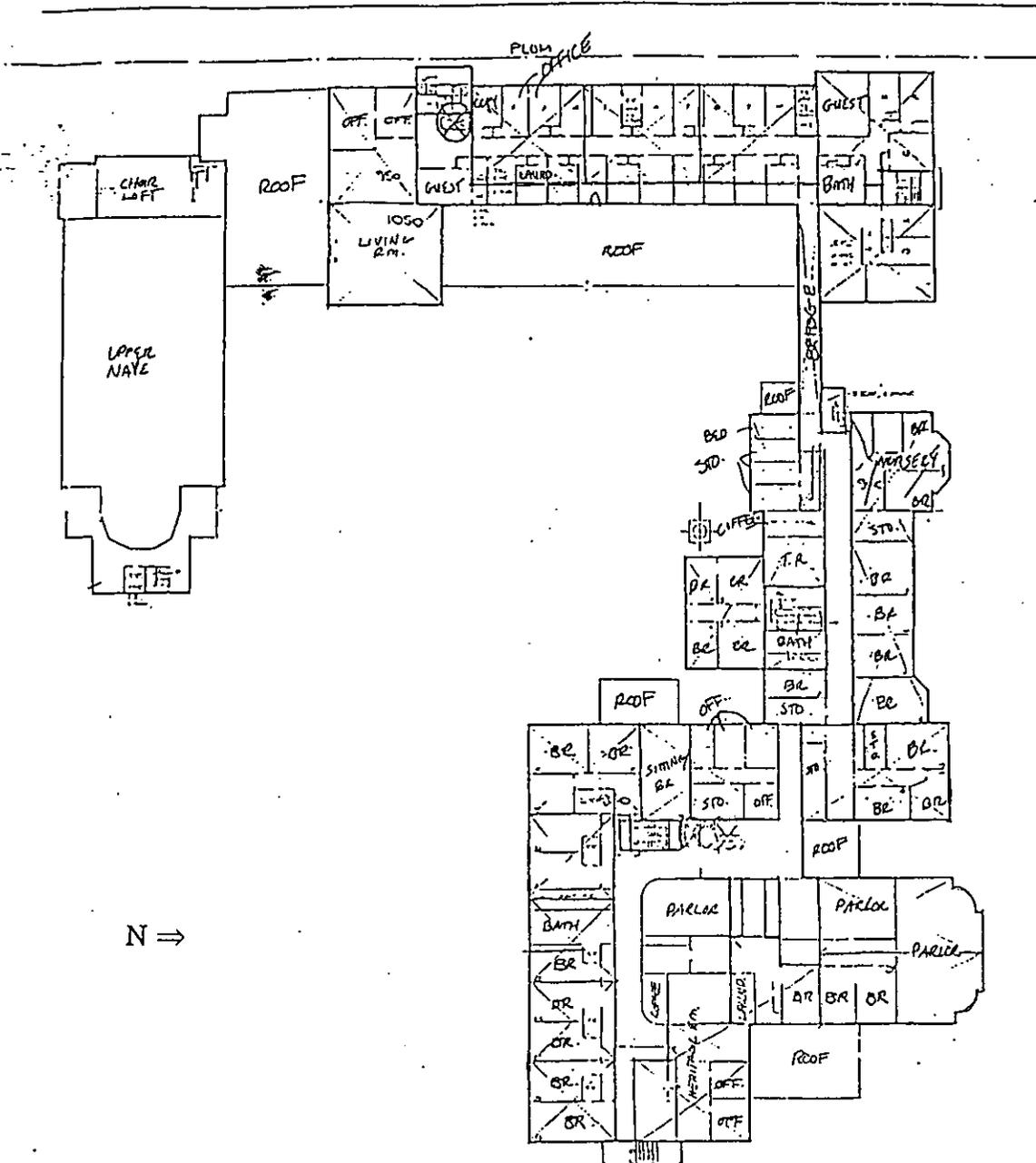


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SECOND FLOOR PLAN



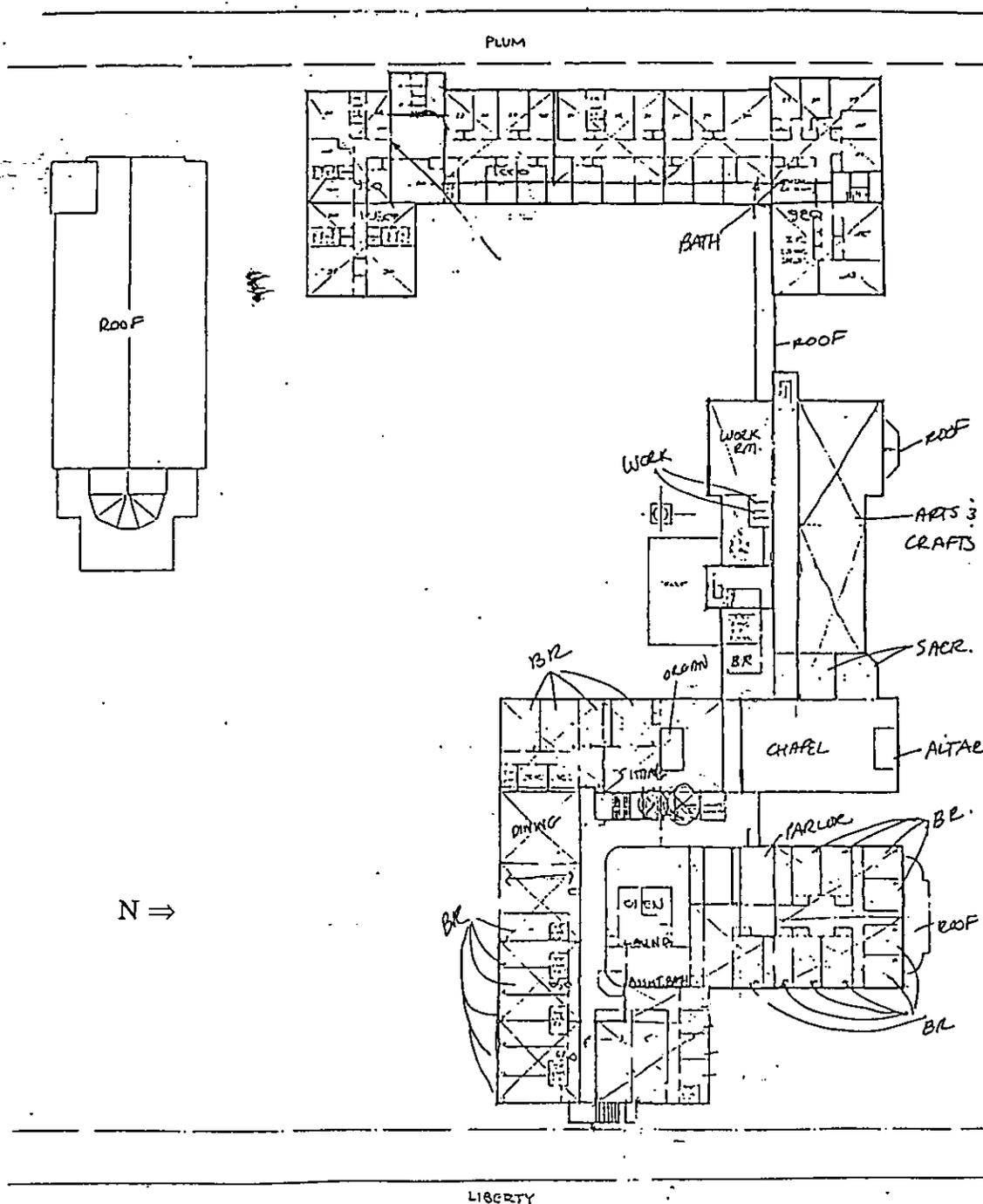
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THIRD FLOOR PLAN

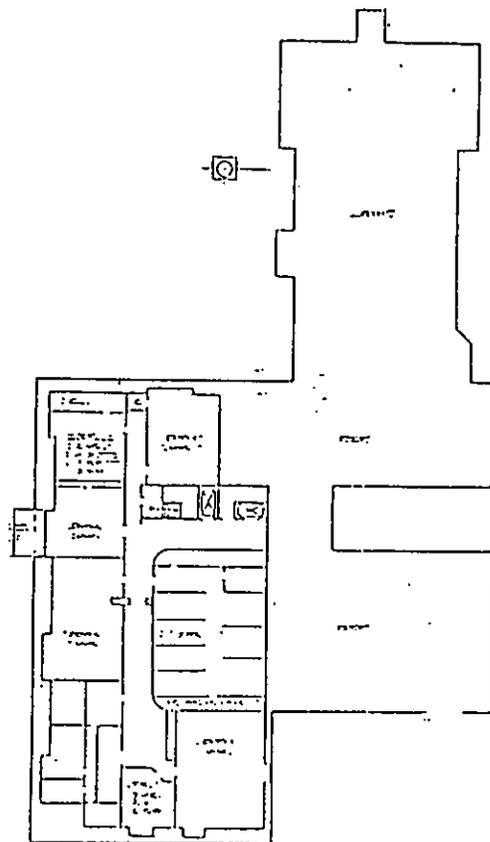
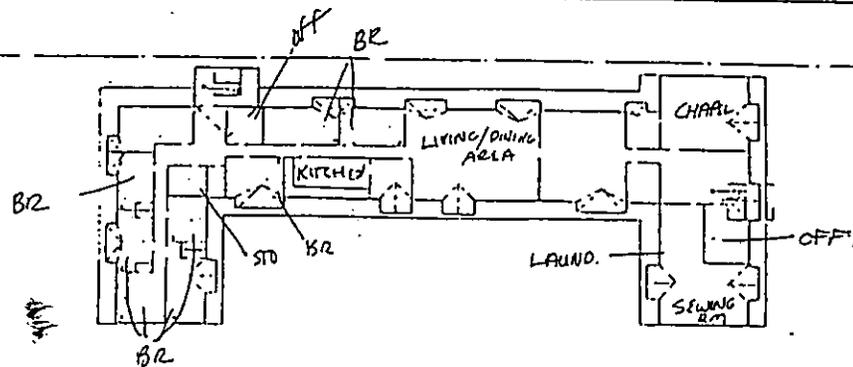


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FOURTH FLOOR PLAN



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The Villa Maria Academy gains its historic significance in the areas of education and architecture, thus meeting National Register criteria A and C. The educational significance of the school began with its dedication in 1892 and though the school continued to function as an educational facility up until 1989, the date of 1946 was selected based on the 50 year criteria. The architectural significance was defined between 1892-1927, the period of expansion; the date of 1892 representing the initial construction phase and 1927 representing the date of completion of the final building, Gannon Hall. The academy, established by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, stands as a landmark in the City of Erie, having served as the first all girls' school in the city and the first college for women in northwestern Pennsylvania. Villa Maria's status as one of the preeminent religious educational facilities was evidenced by its continually expanding student population which forced the Sisters to construct additional buildings in 1904 and 1927. Architecturally, the buildings survive as outstanding examples of the Late Victorian and Gothic Revival architectural styles and are among Erie's finest examples of the period. Villa Maria was a successful educational institution in the City of Erie for a century.

Summary History

Erie's population and industries slowly began to grow in the early part of the nineteenth century, and so too did its educational system, evolving from a self-supporting, private system to one which was free and public. Formal schooling in Erie began with the opening of the Presque Isle Academy which, for a number of years, was the only school in the city, until the Erie Academy was organized in 1819.¹ Although Erie Academy was founded with the intention of being a public school, all costs for items such as tuition and books were incurred by the student, and it would be many years before the true concept of public education was put into effect.

The public school system began with the passage of the Public School Act of Pennsylvania in 1834. This act allowed all districts in the state to decide whether to adopt the public school system of education. One of the first districts to adopt this system was the City of Erie.

With population on the rise and with the transformation of the region's economy from agrarian to industrial, school enrollment exceeded the intended capacity. This was the catalyst for the movement from the decentralized school systems to the larger centralized systems. The mid-nineteenth century brought the replacement of the small, frame one-room schoolhouses to the larger brick graded classroom buildings.

¹ Miller, John. *A Twentieth Century History of Erie County Pennsylvania*, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1909), 789. Miller's book takes a detailed look at not only the development of the school system in Erie, but also at the number of institutions which existed and continued to exist up until the publication of his book.

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The conditions of schools throughout Erie continued to improve over the years. Although the old frame schools had been replaced by larger brick buildings, the city's growth necessitated the construction of even larger and better equipped schools. Among some of the required improvements was the need for improved methods of heating and ventilation and the installation of modern plumbing.² These improvements were necessary to ensure the continued success of the larger schools opening throughout Erie in the late nineteenth century.

Erie's period of profound growth occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, before changing transportation systems and the ensuing deflation of America's heavy industry, reduced the city's importance as a manufacturing and transportation center. Erie is situated in the far northwest corner of Pennsylvania on a tiny strip of lakeshore land that developed from a trading post fort to a ranking industrial center largely because of its physical attributes, namely its location on the transportation corridor of Lake Erie. With the ample transportation in the northwest corner of Pennsylvania, many industries located in Erie at the end of the nineteenth century and the city underwent a period of rapid expansion. The abundance of "high style" late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings, represents the city's economic success during that period.³

With the success of Erie's industries and the resulting boom in population, continued overcrowding of the schools was imminent. Experts in the field of education began preaching that it was not only necessary to organize schools by grades, but that clusters of grades should be contained in separate buildings. The Erie High School opened in 1866 with an enrollment of 166 students, a number which rose dramatically to 874 in 1909.⁴

Another large institution of that time was St. Benedict's Academy located at 345 E. 10th Street in Erie. In 1870, the Sisters of the Order of St. Benedict established a private academy for the education of young women and children. St. Benedict's primarily served students from the City of Erie. This was not a college preparatory school, rather, the primary objective of this school was to prepare its students for the business world and give them the ability to secure

² Ibid., 796. Miller described these systems as "innovations in furnishing that commended themselves to a progressive people determined to keep pace with the advancing times."

³ Carl E. Doebley and Cynthia A. Rose, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Erie Federal Courthouse and Post Office." (Clio Group, Inc., Philadelphia, 1991).

⁴ Ibid., 795.

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employment after high school, not to continue on to college.⁵

One of the largest school buildings in Erie at the close of the century was the Villa Maria Academy. The entire lot was donated to the Sisters of St. Joseph by Father Thomas A. Casey, who also contributed most of the money necessary for the construction of the academy, and named it Villa Maria.

The Sisters of St. Joseph wished to start an academy for girls, but lacked the funds for establishing their enterprise. In 1891, Father Casey bought the entire square at 8th and Liberty Streets and sold it to the Sisters for one dollar. He then furnished the money to erect the first building.⁶ Father Casey personally oversaw the construction, concerning himself with every detail from the ground-breaking through the completion at which time he turned the building over to the Sister Superior.⁷

Designed by David K. Dean & Sons, one of the city's leading architectural firms, Villa Maria was dedicated on May 29, 1892.⁸ A trend had been established throughout the country where young men of average means attended school only until the eighth grade so that they could obtain employment to provide extra income for their families. Families of above-average means could afford to keep their sons in schools for advanced education. This brought the opportunity for young women to obtain a much higher level of education than was ever possible, since the schools could accommodate more women and since office support positions had been created with the industrialized economy. A disparity emerged in the coursework that was deemed appropriate for women. Prior to industrialization, coursework consisted almost exclusively of reading, writing and arithmetic. Educators began to preach that women required more specialized classes in secretarial skills as well as in home refinement and the arts. One outcome of this development was the establishment of all-girls' schools where women could pursue these skills amongst their peers. Villa Maria became Erie's first all-girls' school.

At the dedication, city superintendent of schools Henry C. Missimer asserted that more institutions such as Villa Maria were essential not only for the future success of women but for

⁵ Information provided by Sister Ann Loretta Urmann, SSJ, during correspondence in October of 1995.

⁶ Robert G. Barcio, Ph.D., "Cathedral in the Wilderness," Diocese of Erie, 1991.

⁷ "Villa Marie Seminary; the Dedicatory Exercises To-Morrow Afternoon - The Procession," *Erie Evening Herald*, May 28, 1892.

⁸ *Erie Pennsylvania Illustrated 1888*, (Erie, PA:Herald Printing and Publishing, 1888), 60.

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the success of the country:

"While the public schools endeavored to educate boys and girls so that they would be able to go out into the world as well-educated men and women, the state does not provide such institutions for the higher branches of learning as seminaries or colleges...the prosperity of the country depended upon the higher education of the women...this is the age for the education of women, and even in the Erie High School this holds good, as three girls to one boy graduates. Parents take their boys from school too early. They take the places of men and this causes an over supply of labor."⁹

Unlike St. Benedict's teaching program, Villa Maria's emphasized academic and college preparatory courses, while teaching a business course. The curriculum of the school was described in a local newspaper:

"When the Academy first opened, the curriculum included Latin, English, French, German, polite literature, botany, astronomy, logic, bookkeeping, algebra, plain and fancy sewing, painting, drawing, crayon, music, stenography, telegraphy and typing."¹⁰

In the early years of the school's operation, the student body was well diversified in terms of social and economic class. In 1908 there were 85 girls registered from 15 states, seemingly suggesting that the institution catered to those of above average means. On the contrary, the Sisters of St. Joseph operated an orphanage and the orphans were educated at Villa Maria as well. In addition, many families from Erie who could not afford the tuition sent their children to Villa Maria through a work program whereupon the girls worked in the laundry room, kitchen and dining room in return for reduced tuition.¹¹ The Sisters of St. Joseph preached a philosophy of social integration long before it became a trend.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the cultural make-up of Erie was predominantly German and Irish. The population was overwhelmingly Catholic and remains so today. While girls of

⁹ "With Imposing Ceremonies: The Villa Marie [sic] Seminary is Dedicated. A Great Concourse of People Present," *Erie Evening Herald*, 30 May, 1892.

¹⁰ "First Boarders of Villa Maria Academy," *The Visitor*, 31 May, 1935.

¹¹ All information on the student enrollment was obtained through written correspondence with historian, Sr. Urmann, SSJ, in January 1996.

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all religious persuasions were readily accepted at Villa Maria, the majority of the students were Catholic.¹²

Although girls of all ages attended the academy since the time of its opening, it was not until August 15, 1895 that the Sisters of St. Joseph voted to grade classes under their jurisdiction. The delay in the decision to grade classes was likely related to the small size of the first class attending the school at its opening, which consisted of approximately 25 students. Within five years enrollment had far surpassed the limitations of the original building.

In 1897, the Villa Maria Academy building also became the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, and by 1902, the school had become so successful that it was clear that the school was in need of enlargement.¹³ On September 8 of that same year, ground was broken for an addition that would be even larger than the original school. The new section was designed by F.F. Hecker of Pittsburgh and built by Kirschner Bros. at a cost of \$80,000.¹⁴ The addition was dedicated on June 21, 1904 at the twelfth annual commencement.

Enrollment records no longer survive from the early twentieth century, though the number of graduates per year is available and is an indicator of enrollment trends. Prior to 1920, the number of graduates per year averaged approximately twelve. In 1920 this number lunged to 51, but was reduced into the high 20s/low 30s where it remained through the 1920s.¹⁵

In the 1920s it was decided to add a college curriculum to the academy and on July 2, 1925 ground was broken for the college addition which was to adjoin the original academy building. Designed by the firm of Fuller and Stickle and also constructed by Kirschner Bros., the addition, known as Gannon Hall and College Chapel, was dedicated on July 27, 1927.¹⁶ There is little known about the firm of Fuller and Stickle. Their partnership was short-lived, dating from

¹² Sr. Urmann, SSJ, written correspondence in January 1996.

¹³ The date of the academy also becoming the motherhouse was included in information provided by Sister Ann Loretta Urmann, SSJ, during correspondence in the summer of 1995.

¹⁴ Miller, *A Twentieth Century History*, 800.

¹⁵ Sr. Urmann, SSJ, written correspondence in January 1996.

¹⁶ Information taken from an article provided by Sister Ann Loretta Urmann, SSJ, from an undated, unnamed source found in the Sisters of Saint Joseph's archives. It is known that the article was written by one of the Sisters. References in the article date it to early/mid 1927.

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1923-1928 at which time they formed separate firms.

While the Sisters of St. Joseph staffed the elementary and secondary classes, in 1930 the Sisters began hiring "lay" teachers to staff the college.¹⁷

The new college addition had the capacity to hold both the academy and the college, with the exception of the grade school (which consisted of grades 1-8), and the art, music and home economic classes. With the movement of the college to a new location in 1962, the grade school moved from the motherhouse into the vacated college area.¹⁸

While no major exterior alterations were made to the academy subsequent to 1927, numerous interior renovations were made to accommodate the growing size of the academy and the changing tastes of its residents. These alterations primarily involved the installation of modern finishes such as carpeting and drywall and in some cases the relocation of partition walls. On July 1, 1989 Villa Maria College integrated with Gannon University and became co-educational on August 29 of the same year. In the spring of 1993, the arrangement between Gannon University and Villa Maria was formalized and their integration became a merger. Conceivably, the academy buildings did not suit the needs of the university, for Gannon returned the Villa Maria Academy to the Sisters of Saint Joseph at that time.¹⁹

Architectural Significance

The Villa Maria Academy stands as a distinguished example of the variety of architectural styles popular for religious educational facilities of the period and contains the characteristics and features representative of the Late Victorian, Late Victorian Gothic and Late Gothic Revival architectural styles.

David K. Dean & Sons, one of Erie's premier turn of the century architects, designed the original 1892 building. Dean came to Erie ca. 1880 and within a decade established himself as

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Information provided by Sister Ann Loretta Urmann, SSJ, during correspondence in October 1995.

¹⁹ Taken from information provided by Sister Ann Loretta Urmann, SSJ, during correspondence in the summer of 1995.

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one of the city's most notable firms.²⁰ David K. Dean & Sons specialized in the design of public buildings and offices for the region's successful industrialists. Their buildings expressed their desire to work in a range of architectural styles, though seemingly favorable to the Late Victorian. Among their more notable commissions were the City Hall, The Home for the Friendless, Downing's Insurance Building, Dime Savings Bank, Masonic Building, New Central School Building and the Y.M.C.A. Gymnasium.²¹ All of these buildings have been demolished, further contributing to the architectural significance of Villa Maria as a rare surviving example of the work of this firm.

Shortly after the construction of the original 1892 building and its addition in 1904, the late Victorian architectural style was considered by the public to be truly garish and was abandoned in favor of the more graceful Colonial Revival style. In turn, Erie, like many comparable cities, demolished a number of their grand Victorian edifices. The original Villa Maria building stands as one of Erie's few surviving buildings demonstrating the Late Victorian architectural style.

Perhaps a result of the availability of private funding sources, the original building was fitted with the most modern amenities that did not become the standard in public school buildings for decades to follow. The original building was equipped with electric as well as gas lighting, and an electric fire alarm system.²²

F.F. Hecker, the Pittsburgh architect of the 1904 section, sought to continue the design framework and palette of materials established by Dean & Sons in the design of the original building. In keeping with the rapid change in public tastes at the turn of the twentieth century, Hecker modified certain design features such as the heavy Victorian paneling and stair features and designed elements of a simpler, more graceful appearance that nevertheless remained sympathetic to Dean's earlier work.

²⁰ "Death Claims David K. Dean," (July 24, 1911) obituary. No newspaper listed, David K. Dean and Sons file, Erie County Historical Society.

²¹ *Erie Illustrated*, 60.

²² The information was extracted from a lengthy article contained in the files of the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Although archivist Sister Ann Loretta Urmann, SSJ, was unable to locate the source of the article, at the close of the article best wishes for the academy are given by the *Gazette*. Also, The initials F.S.P are listed at the end of the article. Sister Urmann has indicated that these may stand for F.S. Phelps. This article discusses events planned to follow the building's dedication and, therefore, was likely written in May of 1892.

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Gannon Hall, built thirty-five years after the original 1892 building, demonstrates the effect of developing building codes on school building architecture of the period. While the original building was designed with an electric fire alarm system, it was far from fire-safe with its open stairs and abundance of wooden trim and features. In contrast, Gannon Hall, built after the enactment of rigorous standards, is constructed of fireproof materials and methods including enclosed stair halls, metal windows and terra cotta tile flooring.

Together, the Villa Maria Academy buildings demonstrate the evolving trends in architecture at the turn of the twentieth century and illustrate the impact of building codes on the design of school buildings of the period. The academy survives as one of Erie's most cohesive collections of architect-designed period buildings retaining the distinctive characteristics that represent the Late Victorian, Late Victorian Gothic and Late Gothic Revival architectural styles.

Educational Significance

Villa Maria Academy also gains its significance in the area of education for being the first all girls' school in the City of Erie and the first Catholic college for women in northwestern Pennsylvania. Evolving trends in education such as the promotion of women's education and the branching of course offerings away from the government-mandated compulsory courses are demonstrated in the development of the academy. Course offerings at the academy were varied somewhat from the state requirements. In addition to schooling in the mandatory subjects such as math and science, instruction in music, art, conduct and "the general culture and refinement that pertain to the sex" were also included.²³ When the Villa Maria Academy was opened, it was considered a finishing school for young ladies. The arts were of equal importance to the academic courses. High moral standards were to be fostered along with etiquette and social graces.

Period education philosophers spoke of the need to improve the design of school buildings to expand curriculums to stimulate the mind and to promote students to pursue higher education. Villa Maria's grounds were designed to provide a serene, reflective environment where students could not only receive the highest quality education available but also find enlightenment in the surrounds. An abundance of trees and shrubs were planted and from the rear porch one would have been able to take refuge after a long day's study.²⁴

²³ Miller, *A Twentieth Century History*, 800.

²⁴ Ibid.

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At the time of its construction, Villa Maria was one of the largest schools in the City of Erie and the only school designed with the intent of instructing women, a trend which would continue through the twentieth century. Villa Maria drew its enrollment from many states and its reputation as one of the region's finest religious education facilities is evident. It remained a successful educational facility until recent years and stands as a significant institutional landmark in the city.

Possessing a high degree of integrity, Villa Maria Academy embodies the educational and architectural traditions that define its significance. The academy was profoundly innovative for its period, having promoted the education of women at a time when the notion of advancement in women's instruction was at its inception. The buildings that comprise the academy are well-preserved, architect-designed buildings that retain the predominant characteristics which typify their architectural style. The academy served the community for a century and clearly represents the traditional Catholic educational institution of its period and thus warrants being placed on the National Register under Criteria A and C.

