

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*'Say It Ain't So, Charlie:'
Comiskey's Labor Dispute and
the Opening of Lexington Park*

Page 14

Summer, 2004

Volume 39, Number 2

*From Farm to Florence: The Gifted Keating
Sisters and the Mystery of Their Lost Paintings*



Madonna of the Rosebower (Stephan Lochner, c. 1435; Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum). A beautiful example of the elegant International Courtly Style of the late Middle Ages, this 3' by 5' copy was painted by Sr. Anysia in 1939 as a gift for her niece, Margaret H. Marrinan. See article beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director
Priscilla Farnham
Editor
Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

James A. Russell
Chair

Marlene Marschall
President

George A. Mairs
First Vice President

W. Andrew Boss
Second Vice President

Judith Frost Lewis
Secretary

J. Scott Hutton
Treasurer

Duke Addicks, Charles L. Bathke, W. Andrew Boss, Norlin Boyum, Joseph Campbell, Norbert Conzemius, Anne Cowie, Charlton Dietz, Charlotte H. Drake, Joanne A. Englund, Robert F. Garland, Howard Guthmann, Joan Higinbotham, Scott Hutton, Judith Frost Lewis, John M. Lindley, George A. Mairs, Marlene Marschall, Laurie Murphy, Richard Nicholson, Marla Ordway, Marvin J. Pertzik, Penny Harris Reynen, David Thune, Glenn Wiessner, Richard Wilhoit, Laurie Zenner, Ronald J. Zweber.

Richard T. Murphy, Sr.
Director Emeritus

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, *chair*; James B. Bell, Thomas H. Boyd, Mark Eisenschenk, Tom Kelley, Laurie Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Paul D. Nelson, David Riehle, C. Richard Slade, Steve Trimble, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, William Fallon, Robert S. Hess, D. W. "Don" Larson, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Robert Mirick, Marvin J. Pertzik, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, chairman
Commissioner Susan Haigh
Commissioner Tony Bennett
Commissioner Rafael Ortega
Commissioner Janice Rettman
Commissioner Jan Wiessner

David Twa, manager, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 2004, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Fax 651-223-8539; e-mail address admin@rchs.com.; web site address www.rchs.com

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 39, Number 2

Summer, 2004

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 *From Farm to Florence: The Gifted Keating Sisters
And the Mystery of Their Lost Paintings*
Margaret M. Marrinan
- 14 *Say It Ain't So, Charlie*
The 1897 Dispute Between Charles Comiskey
And the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly
Over the Opening of Lexington Park
David Riehle
- 19 *The Rondo Oral History Project*
Buelah Mae Baines Swan Remembers Piano
Lessons and a 'nice vegetable garden' Out Back
A HandinHand Interview with Kate Cavett
- 24 *Spring Wagons and No Roads*
A Gibbs Daughter Remembers a Pioneer
Family's Sunday as 'a serious undertaking'
Lillie Gibbs LeVesconte
- 26 Book Reviews

Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

Judge Margaret H. Marrinan has long had more than just the casual interest of a family member in the artistry of her two aunts, Sr. Anysia and Sr. Sophia Keating, who belonged to the Congregation of St. Joseph of Carondelet in St. Paul and were sent by their Order to Italy from 1908 to 1910 to study art and copy Old Masters' paintings. The many reproductions of famous religious and secular paintings that the Sisters made during their three-year journey, as well as those they made after their return to the College of St. Catherine, have been a source of great pride to Judge Marrinan and her family, but have also raised many questions concerning what became of these paintings beginning in the 1950s.

Judge Marrinan unravels this tale as best she can, but a full account remains untold. So that our readers will better appreciate the artistry of Sr. Anysia and Sr. Sophia, the Society has reproduced eight of their paintings in full color on the front and back covers and in selected pages of this issue. The Society also salutes the College of St. Catherine, which on August 31 begins a nearly year-long celebration of its 100th birthday, by publishing these paintings and acknowledging the talent, hard work, and faithful dedication of two of the many women religious who have served so well to educate so many at the College over the past century.

John Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Byron R. Mortensen Remembers The Society in His Will



Byron R. Mortensen
1949-2003

Byron R. Mortensen (1949-2003) was born in St. Paul and spent the early years of his life at 865 Sherwood Avenue, near Arcade Street. His father, Gordon Mortensen was an East Sider, but his mother, Loretta, was from the West Side. In 1961 the Mortensen family moved to White Bear Lake, where Byron, his brothers, Gordon Jr. and Neil, and his sister, Arvilla, all grew up.

Byron graduated from White Bear Lake High School. One of his favorite school activities was the Photography Club, a hobby that Byron continued as an adult. After high school, Byron attended Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn., studying history and business. He completed his business education at Lakewood Community College.

Using his business training well, Byron was employed by various Twin Cities businesses in the food service industry. He became very skilled at analyzing food preparation and handling equipment and arranging for its installation at commercial sites. His employer for about the last six years of his life was Commercial Kitchen Services in St. Paul.

Byron's father had been a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army and had served in

From Farm to Florence: The Gifted Keating Sisters and the Mystery of Their Lost Paintings

Margaret M. Marrinan

What muse is it that will spirit two farm girls from their rustic beginnings in nineteenth century rural Minnesota to the wonders and sophistication of the European continent? Finding the answer to that riddle one century after the fact has led the author to a greater appreciation of the gifts and ingenuity of the Sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

As a child, I was a frequent visitor to the College of St. Catherine, the home of Sister Anysia Keating, my great-great aunt. I remember trying to sit properly on the scratchy, stiff Victorian chairs that graced the large parlor at Derham Hall. I remember trying—with little success—to maintain interest in the conversation between my parents and my aunt, who by that point was in her nineties, and still sharp as a tack. All around us, on the three walls of the parlor hung massive paintings painted by my aunt, her sister (also a nun) and another of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Such large and dramatic paintings were an integral part of my upbringing: the Marrinan family homes all displayed both large (floor to ceiling) and small oils, as well as watercolors and ceramics painted by Sister Anysia.

Growing up surrounded by such art, one takes it for granted and gives little thought to the training or discipline which created it. So it was for me until about two years ago, when I received a call from a relative I didn't even know existed.

Lael Dudley Grathwal was a woman with a mission: she was researching her Keating family history and was particularly curious about the artwork created by Sisters Anysia and Sophia Keating. These sisters were prolific painters, and while her own family possessed some examples of their art, she was curious as to the extent of works owned by the Marrinan side of the family.

Over the next year and a half, we met several times, trying to get a grip on the breadth of the works created and trying to track them down. We sifted through dusty

archives and toured certain of the properties presently (and formerly) owned by the Congregation, all the while trying to piece together just what it was that transformed these two farm girls into accomplished, well-traveled artists and teachers.

To really understand their evolution, one must first understand the mission and goals of the entrepreneurial women who headed the Sisters of St. Joseph in their early years in St. Paul.

Some thirty years after the Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in St. Paul in 1851, Sister Seraphine (née Ellen Ireland, sister of Archbishop John Ireland) assumed the

The College of St. Catherine is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, beginning on August 31, and extending to June 30, 2005.

position of its Provincial Superior. By 1884, the Congregation operated some twenty-three institutions ranging from hospitals to schools to orphanages. This rapid growth gave rise to two major concerns: the raising of funds to create and maintain these institutions, and the creation of adequate housing for the quickly growing community of Sisters.

In 1884, Mother Seraphine's cousin, Mother Celestine (née Ellen Howard) pro-



Floral Still Life. Proficient in water as well as oil, Sr. Anysia painted this watercolor between 1910-1913. A stickler for proper framing, in this case she also color "washed" the mat surrounding the painting to reflect and complement her subject. Unless otherwise indicated, all illustrations for this article are from the author, including those on the front and back covers.



Sister Anysia Keating

posed a solution to both the housing issue as well as the money-raising concerns. St. Agatha's Conservatory of Music and Art, which opened in the fall of that year, both provided housing for the growing numbers of sisters and offered to the public classes in painting, music, and other fine arts. To finance the purchase of the buildings that would house the Conservatory, the sisters mortgaged other property they owned, notably St. Joseph's Hospital and St. Joseph's Academy.

Owing to the combination of extreme self-sacrifice practiced by the Sisters at the Conservatory, as well as to the sound success of their artistic programs, St. Agatha's quickly became the financial engine that fueled other major projects of the Community, particularly land and property acquisition and development. The most notable and ambitious of these was the College of St. Catherine¹.

The use of the arts to generate income was a natural fit with the Congregation, which had long since built a strong reputation in France for both its students and teachers of music and art. Then, as now, its philosophy stressed the importance and the relationship of the arts to the education of the whole person. It was natural, then, for the Community to push its own to excel in the various areas of the arts.

It is at this juncture that the stories of

the Keating sisters join those of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Typical of so many Irish families, the Keatings emigrated from Ireland in the late 1840s, settling first in Vermont, then in rural Scott County in Minnesota. The farmland on which they settled, adjacent to that of my Marrianan forebearers,² is evocative of the Irish countryside from whence they came: rolling, verdant hills dimpled with small lakes. Their home was a typical farmhouse of the era, a competent but sparsely decorated shelter reminiscent of Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. By 1885, after several years of hardscrabble farming, the Keatings migrated to St. Paul.

Margaret and Catherine were two of seven daughters born to John and Honora Leahy Keating. As was common for families of that period, most of the daughters received an education through the eighth grade. Margaret and Catherine appear to have received more education than that, even before their entry into the convent.

Margaret, who took the name "Sister Anysia," entered the convent in 1884 at the age of twenty-three. Her first teaching assignments were at the high school level, first at Holy Angels' Academy in Minneapolis, then at St. Joseph's Academy in St. Paul. In 1904 she became a



Sister Sophia Keating

member of the founding faculty of the College of St. Catherine, where she remained for most of her life.³ The person whom I remember was short on physical stature, but long on laughter; she had a reputation for being outspoken, witty, and independent, even in her nineties. She had a way with children: to this



Highland Park in the Tuscan Mode, 1937, oil. Between her arrival on the campus of St. Catherine in 1904 and into the late 1930s, this area of St. Paul grew steadily. In this personal favorite of mine, Sr. Anysia blended the landmark Highland Water Tower (built in 1928) and Our Lady of Victory Chapel (on the college campus) with her imaginary Tuscan village.

day, I remember her teaching me how to sketch trees using minimal lines, and how realistic they looked, even when done by young child.

Catherine entered the convent in 1886 at the age of twenty and assumed the name of "Sister Sophia." Very little is known about her personality, as she died in 1920 when only forty-nine. She was assigned to the faculty of St. Agatha's Conservatory, where she was a popular teacher. Among the archives from St. Agatha's is the 1915 reminiscence of one of her students, Hazel Brewer Wilson, who studied watercolor under Sister Sophia:

She was a marvelous teacher. . . . [she] had some of the most beautiful watercolors that she had done in Italy to show us. She would often put up some little thing she had done and let us copy it. We would acquire the kind of technique that she liked the most . . .

Because Sisters Anysia and Sophia excelled at the visual arts,⁴ their superiors selected them to study in Europe for a period of three years, from 1908 through 1910. While there, they studied under select masters at the major museums in Florence, Milan, Naples, Rome, Venice, Munich, and Paris. In addition to their studies, they were charged with copying several of the great masters' works.⁵ While their directive emphasized religious paintings of the Renaissance, Sister Anysia, displaying her independent, broad vision, managed to sneak in a few paintings from more contemporary eras. She was particularly taken with the Impressionists.

Sister Anysia provides a first-hand description of this European adventure in her diary, handed down from her niece, my great-aunt Margaret Marrinan, to my brother James. That such a diary was created, let alone survived, is testimony to the independent, feisty nature of Sister Anysia: nuns of that era were discouraged from keeping any personal memorabilia, and at their death, whatever remained was destroyed.⁶

The diary gives one a greater appreciation of the magnitude of this endeavor. Reading this first-hand account of the voyage brings home the inconvenience of travel at that time. Unlike today's traveler who is whisked in a few hours to Europe via the sterile time-tube of a jet, this trav-



John Keating

eler of 1908 observed at her departure on September 15, 1908 that "when we were out [of New York] half an hour from land, there was a feeling of separation more felt than any land journey could give. I felt already that we were weeks and months away from home, although we only left a few moments ago."

Crossing the Atlantic was rough. The women traveled on the *Hamburg American*, which fought stormy seas (the worst the ship had encountered in forty years) for the first five days of the two-week voyage. *Every* passenger was seasick, with the exception of one small child and Sister Anysia, who opined on the condition with a certain tongue-in-cheek:

Try to avoid it if you can. Do not think that it will do you any good. My experience is to consider yourself the exception to the general rule to Seasickness and that you are not to be sick under any circumstances whatever. Eat lightly in the beginning even if you are hungry. Everybody has a good appetite the first few days, but after a while they commence to drop off one by one until at last you are left quite alone and you have the table all to yourself.

After a short stop in Naples, the ship finally docked in Genoa, whose treasures Sister Anysia describes in some detail.

Between the tramways and cabs (presumably horse-powered) it was fairly easy to tour that city and within a few days the small party was able to visit several churches, palaces, and other repositories of art. Despite the richness of its treasures, Genoa was but an entry into Italy for the travelers. Within a couple of days they were on their way to Florence, where they called on the American consul and applied to Rome for the permits necessary for visiting and copying in the Italian galleries and museums.

For the next seven months the sisters lived in a 400-year-old convent while they studied Italian and familiarized themselves with the city and its museums, galleries, and churches. Her diary reveals that Sister Anysia was fluent in French before she undertook this journey. On one occasion early during the stay in Florence, the nuns visited the Carmelite Convent, a cloistered society:

The Mother Superior spoke to us through the grate—we did not see her, but only heard her voice. She spoke in French, for I did not know Italian at that time . . .⁷

The galleries of the Pitti Palace were a second home to the artists. Once they had their permits, they were allowed to visit them as often as they wished. Sister Anysia's diary devotes a lot of attention to both the various galleries as well as the palace itself. Their contents were overwhelming:

It would take a whole book to describe the paintings in this gallery. There are at least thirty rooms in these two galleries, or rather one, for I call the Pitti a part of the Uffizi. They are connected by a covered gallery about a half-mile long, passing over the Old Vecchio Bridge and through the tops of the houses . . . It is a beautiful walk especially when the weather is bad outside. I walked back and forth from one gallery to the other many a time . . . I wish I had a dollar for every time I crossed this bridge: I think I would have as many dollars as the bridge has years!

The eye of the artist is not confined to one medium. Sister Anysia notes not only the magnificence of the architecture, sculpture, and paintings of Florence, but also of its textiles. In visiting the Cathe-



James Marrinan and his family at their St. Paul home, 147 East Eleventh Street. Martin J. Marrinan and James W. Marrinan are seated on the lawn; Mrs. James (Honora Keating) Marrinan (left) and Margaret H. Marrinan are behind them; Michael J. Marrinan is standing in front of the porch and Mary (Mayme Crimen) Marrinan is seated on the steps; behind them, standing on the porch, are Anne Keating (left) and Bridget (Keating) Cody.

dral Museum, for example, she comments on its liturgical vestments:

The collection of vestments is wonderful—they are done with the needle and represent the life of St. John the Baptist in twenty-seven scenes. These figures are worked with the needle as excellently as if Raphael had painted them with his brush . . .

Within a short time of taking up residence in Florence, it is apparent that the nuns were absorbing not only its arts, but also the rhythms of its daily life. Sister

Anysia gives glimpses of that in her diary and shows herself to be a woman who drank deeply of the sensuous offerings of the area. She paints a verbal picture of the lush Tuscan countryside, its gardens, its music, and yet does not overlook the details of the different customs and happenings of everyday life in this city. Work, though, did interfere with her forays into the regional culture. In late October, she complains that “our sightseeing is getting rather slack—we are too busy with our painting. . . .”

A gap in diary entries testifies to

their industry. The next entry is made in December, at which time her own sister, Sister Sophia, left for a brief visit to Rome with Mother Celestine. Returning to Florence, she vividly described the curiosities of the Roman banquet she had attended: “a ‘flaming pudding’ and a salad with ‘Minerva’ on top of it, ‘Diana’ riding on a chariot of asparagus!” What a change from life on the prairie!

January, 1909 saw the beginning of their formal art lessons under Professor Colosei, director of the Royal Academy of Florence. While they continued to work steadily, they also were given some respite with the arrival and month-long stay of Archbishop Ireland and his sister, Mother Seraphine. During this visit, their work was punctuated with an active social calendar with the archbishop’s party that included numerous excursions throughout the Tuscan countryside. It is striking that these women were able to go so many places and do so many of the things that would have been alien to most women of their generation. While they gave up much of their independence by joining the order, other major doors opened to them and exposed them to a wider world-view and infinitely wider experiences than they could have had otherwise.

After their studies and work were completed in Florence, the nuns lived and painted in several other Italian cities. In each of them, Sister Anysia faithfully records in some detail their beauties, both natural and man-made. She was particularly taken with Raphael. While working in Bologna “a peculiar old town, and noted for other things besides sausages,” she was delighted with his *St. Cecelia*:

I have not seen any other picture of his that I think can compare with this except the *Zella Sapia* in Florence. All Raphael’s paintings are exquisitely graceful and charming. There is a wonderful richness and softness about them that are not found in the masters of the 13th century, for the pre-Raphaelite painters were not good draftsmen. Sometimes you meet with drawings dreadfully disproportioned. The eyes sometimes are mere slits in the middle of the forehead. Of course, they are very valuable at showing what wonderful progress in drawing and coloring was made in the course of a century or so.



Mota Mua, Paul Gauguin. Oil, 1939. Sr. Anysia became enamored of the Impressionists and Post Impressionists following her tour in Europe. After sitting in storage for more than sixty years, this painting was cleaned, revealing its vibrant colors. It now enjoys a prominent place in my son's home.

Her admiration for Raphael did not blind her to his shortcomings, and she was straightforward in her criticism. While working at the Brera Gallery in Milan, she critiqued his *Marriage of the Blessed Virgin* as “not his best work by any means. Although the subject is very fine, the drawing is defective.”

Milan provided many new experiences for her. Among them was the ancient Church of San Ambrosia, founded in the third century. There she noted that “the altar is in the middle of the church where in those days the officiating priest said mass with his face toward the people, consequently standing behind



George Washington. Oil, Sr. Marie Therese Mackey, date unknown. While studying in Washington D. C. following their European tour, Sr. Marie Therese copied the full-length portrait of Washington by Gilbert Stuart. (Its companion, a full-length Martha Washington, also by Stuart, was copied at the same time by Sr. Anysia.) For years the painting was displayed at St. Agatha's Conservatory. As originally painted, this was a massive portrait. What remains today is what you see in this photo.

the altar . . .” The fact that for centuries Catholic priests had their backs to the congregation while saying mass, combined with her comment on this vestige of ancient practice, show how novel an idea that must have been in 1909.⁸

Sister Anysia was struck not only by the beauties of Milan's churches and museums, but also of its commercial buildings:

It is only a step from the Cathedral to the beautiful Gallerie Vittorio Emmanuel, a beautiful bazaar full of shops. It is adorned with some fine modern statues and especially one of Columbus. The ground plan of the building is in the form of a cross, each arm ending in a street. The roof is all of glass, a beautiful thing indeed!

How very different from the buildings she would have known in St. Paul!

From Milan the sisters made their way to Venice. Venice was like a dream:



Andromache Standing at the Urn with Hector's Ashes. Eberhard Wachter, 19th century. An interesting example of art nouveau, this copy was painted by Sr. Anysia between 1910-1915.

The first evening we had a real Venetian sunset. Oh, it was gorgeous! The sky was touched with all the colors of the rainbow. It is the kind I always thought painters exaggerated but which no artist could do more than faintly suggest. Venice is so utterly unlike any other city in the world. It is like a real fairyland city.

Once again, the party stopped to enjoy the beauties of the secular world. They got off-track from a planned visit to the Doge's palace when they stopped to examine shops in the piazza:

They have the most brilliant shops of beautiful pictures, frames, delicately carved and beautiful glassware. Venice is noted for its beautiful glass manufacturing—and by the way, we visited it while we were in the locality. They had also jewelry of the most exquisite workmanship. . . .

From Venice they went on to Munich, where they studied under Herr Knirr of the Akademie des Kunstlerinnen Vereins.⁹

Once again Sister Anysia was an acute chronicler of her environment, describing Munich as "a city where the very air is filled with art . . . the welcome home of the student, a place of inspiration to the artist, far advanced in modern improvements and full of medieval charm."

Munich was a bustling city:

Everyone in Munich seems to be busy. If you go out in the morning at half past eight o'clock you will find the streets crowded with children all having their books strapped on their backs hurrying to school. If you pass by the barracks you will see soldiers learning how to fight.¹⁰ There is one building opposite the Pinakothek where they have their practice grounds; there you can see hundreds of them practicing.

The sisters lived near the Botanical Gardens, where Sister Anysia became a frequent visitor, often cajoling its gardeners to share samples of their plants with her.

These gardens are grand . . . The most interesting to me was the "Palm-House" where there was a splendid collection of tropical plants, among them a full-grown palm tree enclosed in an immense dome-like greenhouse, together with cactus, banana plants and a great many other rare plants.

Her diary is filled with descriptions of the many beautiful galleries and public buildings. In the immense National Museum were "all the arts from the simplest painting to the finest cabinet . . . eighty rooms . . . all filled with every imaginable thing you could think of. The Germans are very fond of painting and do it very well. In the old and new Pinakothek¹¹ . . . [are] more than 1,400 pictures, arranged in periods and schools, in twelve rooms and twenty-three cabinets . . . The most beautiful [of the paintings] is Murillo's exquisite *Beggar Boys*. These are sure of admiration . . . [but] the finest of all the old masters is Albert Durer's *Four Apostles*."

After a lengthy stay in Bavaria, the group copied its way through the galleries of Versailles and Paris. Paris does not merit the delightful descriptions of other cities visited, but the Louvre, at which they studied as well as copied, made a definite impression: "It would take a year to describe it."

Late in 1910 the group returned to



*Gypsy with Ukulele. The bangles, jewelry and dress identify the musician as a gypsy, a popular subject of the era. Painted in 1908, along with a companion picture (*Gypsy with a Mandolin*), this original by Sr. Anysia reflects the Romantic school of painting in vogue at the time.*

St. Paul. By that time, they had copied more than 300 oil paintings. Some of these were sold to raise money for the many projects of the Congregation, while many were retained and displayed in St. Agatha's, St. Joseph's Academy and the College of St. Catherine. These venues operated as *de facto* museums, as is reflected in the notes of Sister Ann Thoma-sine Sampson, CSJ on March 14, 1971:

I attended St. Margaret's Academy and the College of St. Catherine. In both schools, I was surrounded by oil paintings and other

lovely works of art. I took the paintings at [St. Joseph's Academy] for granted. It wasn't until I found out that students at the University of Minnesota were brought over by their professors in order to study the paintings because Minneapolis was just beginning to build up its art collections,¹² and it wasn't until Baron von Trapp exclaimed over our parlours . . . that I began to realize what our Sisters were trying to do. . . . The arts have always played a major role in the education of our students. Our Sisters have tried to expose us to the best. It has been interesting to see how the paintings have been moved around and how many have been discarded or reused. . . .

Indeed, what *had* happened to this wealth of paintings?

By the mid-nineteen fifties, two forces conspired against their survival. The first was the successive closings of St. Agatha's Conservatory and St. Joseph's Academy. The second was the evolution of taste within the art community, primarily at the College of St. Catherine: the large, religious, Renaissance



An art class at the College of St. Catherine. College of St. Catherine archives.

paintings fell from grace, giving way to the contemporary movement of the mid-century. Thus it was that the former jewels of the Sisters were taken down and sold or stored.

After seventy-eight years of fostering the arts, St. Agatha's Conservatory

closed its doors in 1962. The paintings housed there were scattered to the winds: some to St. Joseph's Academy; some to the Little Sisters of the Poor; some to the Cancer Home;¹³ some to private purchasers.

Although the paintings were primarily religious, the archives from St. Agatha's allude to copies of the Gilbert Stuart portraits from the White House of George and Martha Washington done by Sister Anysia and Sister Maria Teresa Mackey.¹⁴ According to Sister St. Margaret Jordan, superior of the Conservatory in 1962,¹⁵ the state Capitol possessed a large picture of Lincoln in the House chamber, but only a small picture of Washington in the Senate chamber. Archive notes state that "Governor Elmer Andersen and a man from the Historical Society came to see

them . . . the governor said he would be glad to have them. . . ." They intended that Washington would be placed in the Senate chamber, while the picture of Martha would go to the Minnesota Historical Society because it was painted by a Minnesota artist, a Minnesota woman.¹⁶



St. Agatha's Conservatory in the mid-1880s when Sister Sophia was assigned to teach there. This was the home of Judge Edward Palmer until the Sisters of St. Joseph bought it in 1886 and moved the Conservatory there, then constructed a larger building behind it. Although the Conservatory closed in 1962, the building still stands as the Exchange Building at Exchange and Cedar streets in downtown St. Paul. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.



The Randolph Avenue gates of the College of St. Catherine. College of St. Catherine archives.

The paintings were so large that the first two trucks sent for them were too small. Finally a third truck was dispatched and successfully spirited them away. That, apparently, is the last anyone heard about those paintings. When I first contacted the Minnesota Historical Society to inquire as to their whereabouts, staff informed me that these paintings are not reflected

in their inventory, and that the Capitol does not possess the George Washington portrait. Given the size of these paintings, one couldn't help but wonder how they had fallen off the radar screen.

The whereabouts of those paintings would have remained a mystery were it not for a fortuitous suggestion by Kathy Daniels, curator of the Catherine G. Mur-

phy Gallery at the College of St. Catherine, that I contact Thomas O'Sullivan, one of the former curators from MHS. He recalled having heard of the paintings while there and was so intrigued by the mystery that he made independent inquiries which resulted in their discovery. At his suggestion, I contacted Brian Szott, curator of art, who graciously allowed my brother and me to inspect the paintings.

Curatorial standards in the 1960s are a far cry from those practiced today. George Washington never made it to the Capitol. Instead, he was taken from his frame and unceremoniously drawn and quartered: what had been a full-length portrait was now a three-foot square piece chopped off at the abdomen. Martha had fared somewhat better, but had also been cut down substantially.

These sorry remnants remain in storage at the Minnesota Historical Society. Given their condition and the fact that they never will be displayed, the Sisters of St. Joseph have requested that the paintings be returned to them, to be restored as best they are able. At the time of this article, no response to the request has been received.

In an effort to track down those paintings sent to the Little Sisters of the Poor, I contacted that Congregation. Unfortunately, while their old facility with its high ceilings was able to accommodate several of the paintings, their new facility was not. What those paintings were and where they went is a mystery.

Of those paintings sent to St. Joseph's Academy, we know somewhat more. Shortly before that school closed in 1971, Sister Ann Thomasine Sampson inventoried its paintings, describing each by its location within the school, its title, original artist, the museum at which the original was housed, and the copying artist. When the school closed, the paintings—more than twenty-five of them—were sold to the public. Whether any were retained by the Order is questionable. Among them were Sister Anysia's copies of Raphael's *Madonna del Balchachino* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence) and *Holy Family* (Munich), Murillo's *Madonna of the Rosary* (Pitti Gallery, Florence) and Andrea del Sarto's *Annunciation* (Uffizi

Gallery, Florence). Again, there was no hint as to the fate of these paintings.

Early into this project, we believed that certain of Sister Anysia's original landscapes might have been purchased by the owner of the University Club, John Rupp.¹⁷ I contacted him and he told me that while the University Club had none of the paintings, he *had* acquired two paintings from a woman who had purchased them from St. Joseph's Academy when it closed. He had not been able to identify the paintings or their artists. He had installed these at the old St. Agatha's building, now the Exchange Building.

A trip to the Exchange Building was like traveling back in time. One enters via a split-step entry facing Exchange Street, and is struck by the similarity this building bears to others built by the Sisters of St. Joseph: the imposing, grand parlors (which retain their fireplaces and hand-painted tile surrounds), wide corridors and high ceilings. All create an impression of spaciousness and European elegance. All that was missing were the swish of long black habits, the clack of rosary beads, and the smell of soap and

starch that I associate with the nuns of my childhood.

To the right as one enters is the large parlor whose photo is found in the 1989 article on St. Agatha's.¹⁸ I mention this because of the very large painting of the Assumption seen in that photograph: fate and John Rupp have returned it to the building. Situated at the end of the hall, the painting stretches from floor to ceiling and dominates all around it. I cannot identify either the original artist or the sister who copied it.

Closer to the entryway, on a more human scale, hangs a smaller painting. Instinct (or perhaps years of exposure to Sister Anysia's style) led me to believe that this painting was one of hers. It is, in fact, her copy of Andrea del Sarto's *Annunciation*. This is a particularly beautiful rendering of the Annunciation, reflecting in its background the Tuscan countryside.

While the diminution of the collection housed by institutions now closed is regrettable, it is nonetheless understandable. That is not the case with the collection that had been part of the heritage of the College of St. Catherine. By the mid-nineteen-fifties, religious Renaissance art

had fallen from favor at that institution, and the paintings gracing the parlors of Derham Hall and other campus locations were taken down. Where did *they* go?

In pursuing this question, I was assisted by Sisters Miriam Shay and Mary Kraft, both Sisters of St. Joseph. Sister Miriam Shay, a volunteer who works in the CSJ archives, discovered that several of the paintings had been carelessly stored in the damp basement at Mendel Hall on the St. Catherine campus; there they succumbed to mildew and other destructive forces. Archivist Sister Mary Kraft took my cousin and me through the Provincial House and the former Novitiate (training school for sisters). To our delight, we found a copy of Raphael's *Madonna of the Drapery* (Sister Anysia) prominently displayed in one of the parlors.¹⁹ To our sorrow, we found no other paintings.

It is fortunate that Sister Anysia was an independent soul: many of the paintings she copied for the Order she also copied for her relatives. Although the Order at that time did not encourage this practice, she would bundle up her painted treasures in newspaper and bring them over to our family's homes. How she managed to do that with the larger paintings she gave her sister, Honora Marrinan, and my aunt, Margaret Marrinan, is anybody's guess. In any event, she brought more than twenty paintings, both oil and watercolor, to my immediate family members.²⁰ Some of these are copies, some original pieces reflecting diverse styles of painting.

It would be misleading to confine a discussion of Sister Anysia to her paintings. Her versatility, both in medium and style, is reflected in bas-reliefs and statues, as well as in the ceramics for which she was justly famous²¹. Her love of art deco and art nouveau is reflected most strongly in this last media: her vases and other pieces are so beautiful that words cannot do them justice. The use of line, color and various glazes makes each a small masterpiece.

But for her actions—both in keeping her diary and in giving so many pieces of art to her family—much of the amazing story of the ingenuity of these entrepreneurial sisters would now be relegated to books and photographs. The heritage



Students in costume in front of Derham Hall. College of St. Catherine archives.



The Pantheon (Rome). Original watercolor, 1908. The nuns' sojourn coincided with modern Italy's movement to distance itself from Vatican influence. An example of this evolution is found in the Pantheon itself. In the late nineteenth century, two bell towers added during its use as a Catholic church were demolished and the building reverted to the secular Pantheon we recognize today. Several of the people in this 1908 watercolor by Sr. Anysia wear the peasant dress still worn at that time by the lower classes. See article beginning on page 4.

R.C.H.S.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit #3989

