

WISDOM'S HOUSE

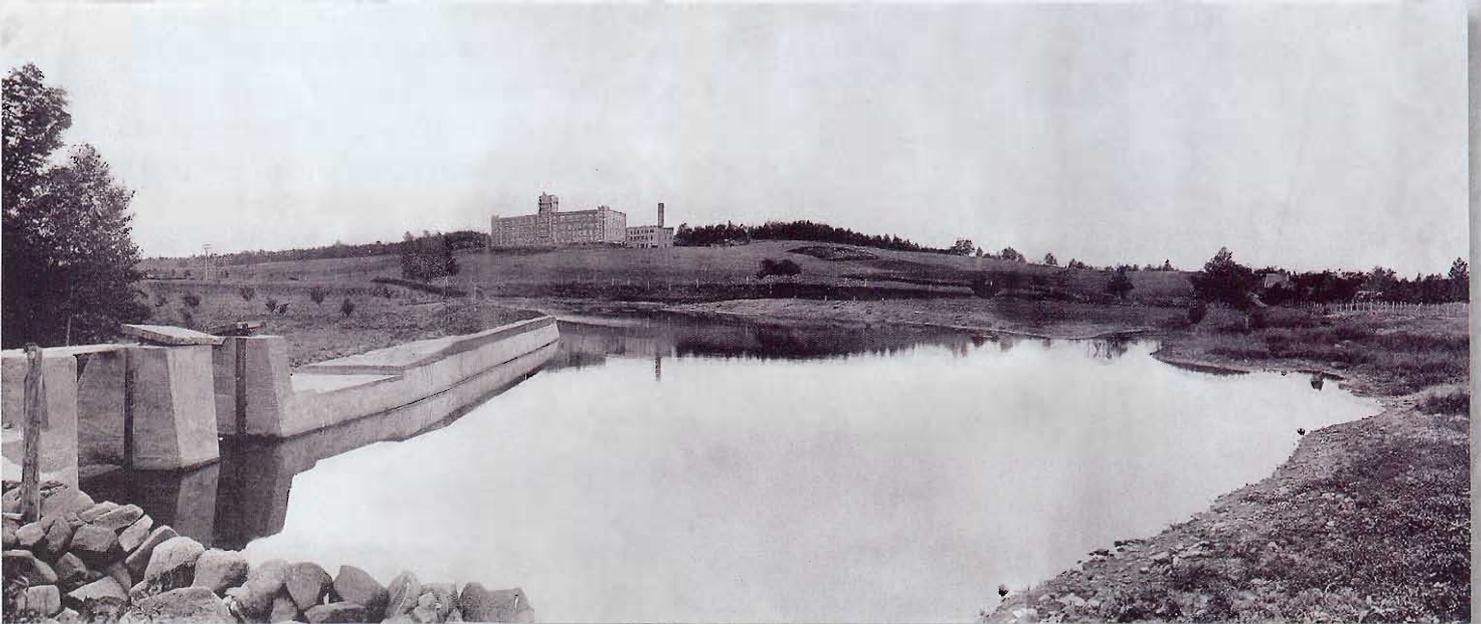
By Sister Margaret Clarke

This is the third in a multi-part history of the construction of Tower Hall and the Sisters' move in 1909 to this site.

Wisdom has built her house; she has made its seven columns. . . . She says to those who are uneducated. . . . "Come in here. . . . take the road of understanding." Prov. 9:1-6 passim. NCV

In September of 1909, when the Sisters and boarding students from Sacred Heart Institute moved into the newly-constructed Villa Sancta Scholastica, they found a spacious and stately new home. One alumna, Valeria Sauve, reported in the June 1910 *Villa Quarterly* her first impressions: "there it stood on the hill in all its stately grandeur, reminding me very much of the feudal castles. . . ." College students today still love "going to school in a castle." The building contained public rooms on the first floor front: parlors, public offices, chaplain's quarters, classrooms. Second floor had classrooms, Community offices, infirmary and Sisters' private areas. Third and fourth floors had bedrooms in the westward-trending wings. On fourth floor front were the Chapel, music and art studios, and library. The students' dining room was on first floor and the Sisters' refectory on second.

A separate building adjacent to the northwest wing held science labs, laundry and sewing rooms, the kitchen, and the dynamo/boiler rooms in the basement. The total cost of the four-story building including the reconstruction was about \$236,000. School opened on September 7, 1909, for 58 boarding students, including six postulants. Only sixteen professed Sisters lived at the Villa, along with eleven novices. The remainder of the 130 Community members lived on the various missions in Duluth and Brainerd. Everyone settled in, and school—elementary and Academy—progressed happily. The only cloud on the horizon was the need to pay the debt.



This anticipatory rendering of the completed Tower Hall was published in many Villa documents long before the construction of even the first tower. The dam on Chester Creek created a pond for skating as well as watering the livestock.



A high school recreation room in 1909



A dormitory for the Academy "little girls." The furniture was still in use for the postulants well into the 1950s.

In June 1911 Mother Scholastica died, and her sister, Sister Alexia, was elected prioress a month later. In the fall of 1911 Sisters Agnes Somers and Katharine McCarthy convinced the Community Council to add a new academic department—junior college, with upper division courses for Sisters only—and The College of St. Scholastica was born, enrolling six students in its first year.



Sisters view the aftermath of the 1913 fire in the boiler room/science laboratory building.

On April 23, 1913, a fire gutted the laboratory-laundry-boiler room building. This also destroyed the dynamos, and the plant was without electricity for several weeks. The students found entertainment in roaming the dark halls after lights out and appreciated having evening study hours curtailed. By fall, the facilities had been rebuilt and the dynamo replaced by city light. In 1916 Mother Alexia died, and Mother Celestine Sullivan was chosen as her successor. Mother Celestine proved herself a very able administrator and managed to retire much of the crushing debt which had accrued through the early building projects.

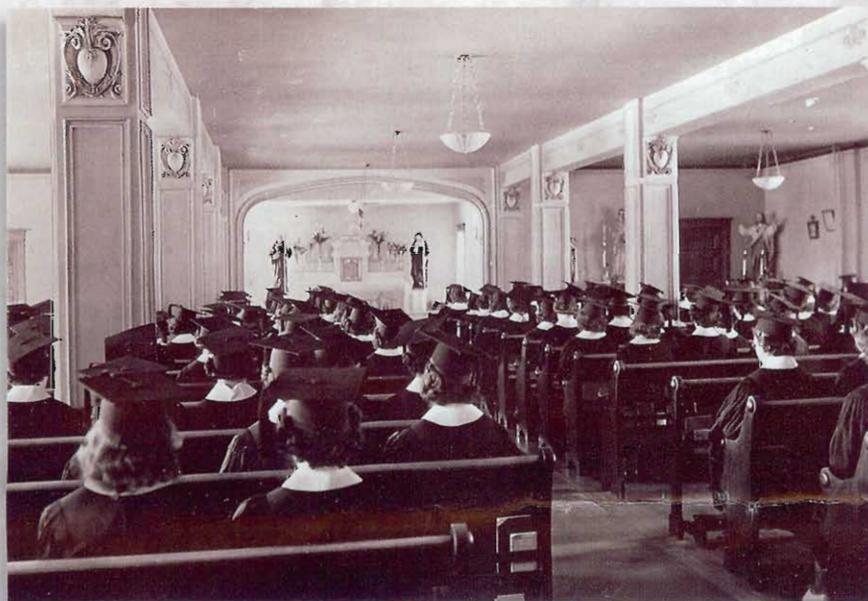
By the end of the First World War in 1918, when national restrictions on building were lifted, the Community was ready to begin a new comprehensive building project: after all, the original plans had not yet been realized! This project was delayed by the 1918 Cloquet fire and the influenza epidemic for which the Sisters opened their closed school buildings to patients and volunteered as nurses.



The 1920 additions: First tower (right) and gymnasium (left)

Mother Celestine was replaced by Mother Chrysostom Doran in August 1919, and the Chapter was ready to proceed with building. Thomas Ellerbe (Franklin's son and the new head of the firm) was hired to design the necessary additions. Construction began. By fall of 1920 an addition to the northwest wing had been completed, providing space on the third floor for a 120-seat chapel (now the College Music Hall) and additional science classrooms and laboratories on fourth floor. The Chapel was dedicated on July 11, 1920, and served the Community for twenty years. A subject of curiosity to many subsequent visitors was the "bump out" at the end of the addition in which the chapel altar was located: according to oral history, canon law required that there be no non-religious construction above a consecrated altar.

Construction continued on a free-standing gymnasium/auditorium built in an architectural style reminiscent of an English country chapel, complete with belfry. This has led to a good deal of confusion during the years, but with the exception of a short period of time early in its history when it was used by St. Anthony's parish for Sunday Mass, it has never formally been a chapel.



Left: College students in the new Chapel in the lateral wing extension. The statues of Sts. Benedict and Scholastica later had their gesso coatings removed to reveal the wood carvings now located at the Monastery entrance in the cloister walk.

Below: Rear view of the 1920 additions showing the lateral wing extension with the Chapel "bump out"



In November 1921 the first (and only, according to the original plan) tower was completed. A large bell, donated by the Agnew family, was consecrated and installed in the new tower. This bell now hangs in the bell tower of the 1938 Chapel. The Community and the student bodies of the Academy and College continued to grow, and within a few years it became obvious that even more space was sorely needed.

To be continued in the Summer 2009 *Pathways*. Photos from Monastery Archives.