The Allure of the French: French-Descended Women, French-Born Counter Revolutionaries, and the Rise of French Cultural Influences

"With but few exceptions, they [the French of Michigan] are Catholics […]. The disadvantages, under which this class have labored, have rendered the majority mostly illiterate. They are noticed to be very tenacious of the ancient customs and manners of their nation, like the same population in other parts of America; but they gradually adopt, though with seeming reluctance, the innovating customs of American immigrants."[1] Published in the 1840 *Gazetteer of the State of Michigan***,** this observation encapsulates the main stereotypes that Anglo-Americans from the east coast perpetuated about the French-descended inhabitants they met as the former moved into the Old Northwest and the trans-Mississippi West. The French were backward, illiterate, and Catholic—all of which were interrelated, according to the author of this quote. Nor did the French seem eager to change their ways to adopt the Anglo-American Protestant ways this author explicitly deemed superior.

Protestant Mary Ann Brown's views of French Catholics in 1840s Indiana decidedly contrasted with the above prejudice. In old age, she fondly recalled her school days at the female Academy of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, established by the French-born Sisters of Providence in 1841, "Fifty years ago—September 1843—I was sent by my parents from Indianapolis to St. Mary-of-the-Woods. […] Everything was strange to me. I had never before seen a Sister, but had been told by one who had read the "Book of Martyrs," that the *nuns* were *dreadful* persons, would put gravel in my shoes, and compel me to do penance in many cruel ways. I soon became accustomed to the peculiar dress and kind of rules, my fears vanished, and I felt myself one of a happy family [emphasis in original]."[2] Her anti-Catholic prejudice

[1] John T. Blois, *Gazetteer of the State of Michigan* (Detroit: Sydney L. Rood & Co., 1840), 156-157.

overcome, Mary Ann sought to convince her Indianapolis friend Mary to join her, confiding that, "if […] you would persuade your mother and father to let you come to Saint Mary's, I should be so delighted […]."[3] Dampening her own enthusiasm, a few lines after, Mary Ann sighed, "Mary, I think there is no use in persuading you to come for fear of the dungeons you think we have. I have never seen them yet and I suppose I never will."[4] From the "gravel" in the shoes to the "cruel penance" and the "dungeons," Mary Ann's writings illuminate the strength of anti-Catholic sentiments in antebellum America. But her experience also suggests that some Protestant parents, like hers, either were free of such prejudice or set them aside in exchange for a French convent education. As Mary Ann well knew, she was at St Mary's to become a "lady of a finished education."[5]

As observed earlier in the dissertation, the commonly held assumption among 19th-century Anglo-Protestants like the author of the *Gazetteer of the State of Michigan* that only they could initiate what they regarded as progress— new schools, technologies, and republican institutions, for instance—have until recently been written deep into the historiography of the early nation and have obscured voices, such as those of Mary Ann Brown and her French-born Catholic teachers. In fact, French Catholics shared Anglo-Protestants' view of progress as education. For instance, French-descended fur trader Joseph Bailly's actively pursued educational opportunities for his four daughters. In the 1820s, he sent his daughters to an Anglophone, Baptist mission school close to his trading post. But while Bailly was probably eager, as his granddaughter asserted, for his daughters to be taught in English, he also wanted

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[2] Mary Anne Browning (née Brown), "Reminiscences of an Old St. Mary's Girl," *Signal*, April 1895. Quoted in Sister St. Philomene Cullity, "Educational Work of the Sisters of Providence in Indiana," (master's thesis, Loyola University Chicago, 1933), 142-143.
[3] Quoted in Sister Mary Borromeo Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods*, vol. 1, *1806-1856* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1949), 523-524.
[4] *Ibidem.*
[5] *Ibidem*.

them to receive a Catholic education and Catholic sacraments.[6] In 1826, likely on a business trip, the fur trader took his daughters to Detroit, 250 miles from the Bailly trading post. There, priests gave the Bailly girls "instruction, not only in Christian doctrine, but also in such studies as they evinced talent for,"[7] which included Latin. Contrary to the Bailly trading post, Detroit provided the Bailly girls with "social advantages,"[8] such as learning how to dance and sing and notions of politeness. Two French-born, well-educated nuns corroborated that Eleanor, one of Bailly's daughters, was "brilliantly educated"[9] and her demeanor was polite and elegant.[10]

French Catholics' shared view of education as progress is further demonstrated by two kinds of French educational undertakings. One was primarily conducted in French and implemented for, and often by, French-descended females. Confronted with the massive migration of Anglo-Americans, teachers in these schools used girls' education to preserve two key cultural elements of the French community—Catholicism and the French language—and bolster Midwestern French communities' position as their demographic weight rapidly decreased. The second, French-style education offered primarily in English, targeted the daughters of elite white families like Mary Ann Brown's. In their young ladies' academies, French-born nuns taught both Anglophone *and* Francophone, Catholic *and* Protestant girls. While the high quality of the French language taught in these institutions was an asset, the broader refinement imparted by the French-born nuns along with their French origins is what made them as popular and prominent as they were.

[6] Frances Rose Howe, *The Story of a French Homestead in the Old Northwest* (Columbus, Ohio: Nitschke Bros, 1907), add page #
[7] *Ibid.,* 58.
[8] *Ibid.*, 61.
[9] Mother Theodore Guérin (hereafter MTG) to Mère Marie, December 3, 1841, Sisters of Providence Archives, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods IN (hereafter SMWA). The original is in French. Translation by Sister Mary Theodosia Mug.
[10] On Joseph Bailly, see John O. Bowers, *The Old Bailly Homestead* (1922). The details on the Bailly girls' schooling are in Howe, *The Story of a French Homestead*, 47-61. French-born Sister Saint Francis Xavier Le Fer found Eleanor Bailly to be a fine person: Sister Saint Francis Xavier Le Fer de La Motte (hereafter SFX) to Sister Eudoxie, November 28, 1841, SMWA.

In this chapter, by examining these two types of French Catholic education—French-speaking and French-style—, I demonstrate that, culturally, the Midwest remained significantly French by 1860. Moreover, I argue that, while the French-descended population became a minority in the Midwest, these educational enterprises helped ensure that French cultural influences increased and diversified. The diverse populations educated by French-born and French-descended Catholics meant that French influence reached far beyond French-descended residents. Just like the dissertation in general, this chapter broadens our understanding of the "French flavor"[11] of the early national West. While most historians have studied the actions of either French-descended Americans or newly arrived missionaries, I demonstrate that both groups helped sustain and expand French cultural influences, often in cooperation with one another.[12] Viewing these two groups alongside each other, in turn, helps appreciate that such influences and the way they fit in the early United States were manifold. While French-speaking education tended to reinforce the ethno-religious boundaries between French communities and newly arrived Anglo-Protestants, French-style education undermined them.

The story of the Midwest's growing French cultural influences complicates the notion that the early US nation was fundamentally Anglo-Protestant.[13] For one thing, French-speaking

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[11] Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 1.
[12] On French-descended Catholics see especially Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier*; Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *Great Lakes Creoles: A French-Indian Community on the Northern Borderlands, Prairie du Chien, 1750-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Catherine Cangany, *Frontier Seaport: Detroit's Transformation Into an Atlantic Entrepôt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Guillaume Teasdale and Tangi Villerbu (dir.), *Une Amérique française, 1760-1860: Dynamiques du corridor créole* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2015); Guillaume Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance: The French Presence in the Detroit River Region, 1701-1815* (McGill Queen's University Press, 2019). On French-born missionaries: Sarah Curtis, *Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-97; Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Christine A. Croxall, "Holy Waters: Religious Contests and Commitments in the Mississippi River Valley, 1780-1830" (PhD diss, University of Delaware, 2016).
[13] Robert Baird, *Religion in America, or, An account of the origin, progress, relation to the state, and present condition of the evangelical churches in the United States: with notices of the unevangelical denominations* (New York: Harper, 1844); Francis Parkman, *France and England in North America*, 7 vol. (1865-1892); Nathan Hatch,

education signaled to Anglo-American Protestants that the advent of US sovereignty did not entail the end of the French cultural identity. For another, the cultural development that historians, reproducing white settlers' racist and colonialist belief in the superiority of the Western civilization, have called the "refinement" of the United States was not simply sustained by Anglo-Protestants as these historians have assumed.[14] French-born Catholic missionaries, especially nuns, were crucial agents of this process in the West. US historians have long ignored nuns due to their double religious and gender marginality. Even women's historians have largely failed to account for 19th-century nuns' experiences due to their focus on domesticity and feminism. By contrast, this chapter deepens our understanding of nuns as major actors of US life and women as integral figures of Euro-imperial projects.[15]

This story also challenges the narrative of antebellum Protestant-Catholic encounter as one of anti-Catholic propaganda and violence, especially against nuns and the way they allegedly subverted the ideal of womanhood centered on women's role as wives and mothers.[16] To be sure,

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The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004)

[14] Richard Bushman locates the origins of refinement in French courts but overlooks the role of French-born immigrants themselves in importing French manners into the early United States. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). François Furstenberg is a notable exception. He demonstrates the impact of French refugees on the spread of French refinement but focuses only on 1790s Philadelphia. François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation* (New York: Penguin, 2014), chaps. 2-3.

[15] For nuns as major actors of US life: Mary Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Arno Press, 1978); "Beyond the Walls: Women Religious in American Life," special issue, *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1996); Mary Denis Maher, *To Bind Up the Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U. S. Civil War* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989); Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Suellen Hoy, *Good Hearts: Catholic Sisters in Chicago's Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006). For the role of women and family in modern empires: John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (1988); Julie Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: 'Civilizing' the West? 1840-1880* (1998 rev. ed.); Anne F. Hyde, *Empires, Nations and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011). Two monographs show the role of nuns in imperial projects, Sarah Curtis for the 19th-century French overseas empire and Anne Butler for US westward expansion. Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*; Anne Butler, *Across God's Frontiers: Catholic Sisters in the American West, 1850-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

as the opening quotations indicates, anti-Catholic sentiments fed many Anglo-Protestants' scorn and sense of entitlement and their diffidence of convent schools. However, the most striking thing about the French nuns and their academies is the high numbers of Protestant students.[17] Mary Ann Brown's case was far from exceptional. While acknowledging the Catholic character of French convent schools, this chapter focuses on their equally obvious yet overlooked *French* character.[18] French sisterhoods, who played a significant role in 19th-century France's female

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[16] The most comprehensive study of anti-Catholicism in the antebellum period is Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938). There is also an abundant historiography on east-coast nativist episodes such as the 1834 burning of the Charlestown convent near Boston and the 1844 Philadelphia riots as well as on the Protestant thirst for anti-convent fiction. See for instance Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), especially 1-193; Nancy Lusignan Schultz, *Fire & Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834* (New York: Free Press, 2000); Michael Feldberg, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975). For works demonstrating how nuns crystallized anti-Catholic discourses and violence see Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, chapters 6 and 7; Cassandra Yacovazzi, *Escaped Nuns: True Womanhood and the Campaign Against Convents in Antebellum America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (1960): 205-224.

[17] My work is part of a recent historiographical trend that reevaluates the place of Catholics and the Catholic-Protestant encounter in the early republic by looking at the West rather than the eastern seaboard and/or taking seriously the work that Catholics did to assert their public role rather than simply looking at the Protestant perspective. For studies of the West see Margaret DePalma, *Dialogue on the Frontier: Catholic and Protestant Relations, 1793-1883* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004); John Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic* (Lexington, KY: Kentucky University Press, 2008); Croxall, "Holy Waters"; Kara French "'You can be a Catholic if you want": Protestant Social Capital and Catholic Education in the Antebellum Era," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 35, no. 3 (2017): 1-19. For a study of how east-coast Catholics successfully secured their prominence in the public sphere see Jeffery R. Appelhans, "Catholic Persuasion: Power and Prestige in Early American Civil Life" (PhD diss, University of Delaware, 2018).

[18] Some historians, mostly nuns who wrote the history of their own—originally French—communities, have recognized the significance of French influences on US convent schools but historians have yet to understand that there is a broader French story to tell than that of individual communities. More recently, lay historians Sarah Curtis, Rebecca Rogers, and Nikola Baumgarten have analyzed the significance of the Religious of the Sacred Heart's French background. Only Mary J. Oates has argued that western convent schools imparted a "cultivated French education" but she states this as a fact without analyzing how nuns imported French models to the United States. In a recent article on western convent schools, Kara French masterfully demonstrated how these schools appealed to Protestants but missed the overwhelmingly French character of the schools she analyzes. For community historians see Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*; Louise Callan, *The Society of the Sacred Heart in North America* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1937) ; Sister Mary Lucida Savage, *The Congregation of Saint Joseph of Carondolet: A Brief Account of its Origin and its Work in the United States (1650-1922)* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book, 1923); Sister M. Michael Francis, *The Broad Highway: A History of the Ursuline Nuns in the Diocese of Cleveland, 1850-1950* (Cleveland: The Ursuline Nuns, 1951). Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 1-74; Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), chap. 8; Nikola Baumgarten, "Education and Democracy in Frontier St. Louis: The Society of the Sacred Heart," *History of Education Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1994): 171-192; Mary J. Oates, "Catholic Female Academies on the Frontier," *US Catholic Historian* 12, no. 4 (1994): 122. Kara French, "'You can be a Catholic if you want."

education, were well prepared to meeting the rising US standards of female education. Furthermore, France's cultural cachet among Western elites at the time provided French-born nuns in the United States with a unique prestige. Lastly, even in the face of anti-Catholicism, an examination of French-speaking education contradicts the idea that French-descended settlers were hapless, passive victims of Anglo-Protestant westward expansion.

French-Speaking Education: The Example of Detroit

Founded by Antoine Laumet de la Mothe, sieur de Cadillac in 1701, and ceded to the British during the Seven Years' War, Detroit was already culturally and ethnically diverse by the time it became a US city in the 1796 Jay Treaty. That year, there were around 500 free inhabitants on the US side of the city,[19] mostly French and British, as well as enslaved Native and black people.[20] Potawatomis, Odawas, Hurons, and Ojibwes—over 2,500 in 1782—also lived around, though not in, Detroit and regularly visited the town for trade and diplomacy.[21] The 1825 completion of the Erie Canal fostered a rapid demographic growth. Detroit had over 2,000 inhabitants by 1830 and 20,000 by 1850, mostly due to the migration of Anglo-Americans and the immigration of Irish and German Catholics.[22] As a result, the French-descended increasingly

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[19] Before 1796, Detroit stretched on both banks of the Detroit River. As a result of the Jay Treaty, the west bank became American and retained the name Detroit, while the east bank became Canadian and renamed Sandwich, and later Windsor.

[20] Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: The New Press, 2017).

[21] Guillaume Teasdale demonstrates that, despite a "cultural métissage" with neighboring Natives, the Detroit French community was not a métis society. Unlike other French settlements, such as Prairie du Chien for instance, intermarriage between French and Natives was rare in Detroit. Teasdale, "The French of Orchard Country," 234-283. Until 1763 there was a Potawatomi village just one mile south of Fort Detroit and Huron and Odawa villages on the opposite bank, but all resettled at least 40 miles south and west from the British fort in the decade following Pontiac's War. Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *Frontier Metropolis: Picturing Early Detroit, 1701-1838* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 62, 71, 78. For the 1782 numbers see Cangany, *Frontier Seaport*, 44.

[22] Cangany, *Frontier Seaport*, n5 p. 218-219 and George W. Hawes, *Michigan State Gazetteer, and Business Directory for 1860* (Detroit: F. Raymond & Co., 1860), 4-5.

became a minority community even if, as seen in an earlier chapter, they fared better than their long-time Native neighbors. Exacerbating the marginalization of the French community, between 1796 and Michigan statehood in 1837, US laws and political institutions replaced French laws and customs (*Coutume de Paris*) that the British had tolerated under the 1774 Quebec Act. Yet, as historian Catherine Cangany shows, long-established Euro-Detroiters, especially merchants, maintained some of their social and cultural independence.[23] In this section, I argue that, through teaching the French language and Catholic tenets, four French-descended women also contributed to maintaining the distinctiveness of the French community, while hoping to sustain its economic position during this period of rapid change.

The growth of French-speaking education initiatives resulted from the mutual effort of Gabriel Richard, Detroit's main priest, and a handful of his female parishioners. Created the same year as Detroit, the Catholic parish of Ste. Anne was central to the life of the French community. It survived the successive imperial changes of the second half of the 18th century and was transferred from the authority of the Bishop of Quebec to that of Baltimore shortly after Detroit became American. In the late 18th century, the Diocese of Baltimore was the only US diocese, stretching from the Atlantic seaboard to the Mississippi River. Lacking personnel to minister to Catholics scattered within this vast stretch of land, the Bishop of Baltimore, John Carroll, gladly received the help offered by a dozen French priests fleeing the French Revolution. Bishop Carroll sent a few of these émigrés in the Old Northwest where most Catholics were Francophone. Father Gabriel Richard was assigned to Ste Anne in 1798 and remained in charge until his death in 1832. Learned and energetic, as a result of his long ministry, Richard became a

[23] Cangany, *Frontier Seaport*, Introduction, chap. 4., and epilogue.

major public figure, deeply invested in the life of the French community, the city of Detroit, and the Territory of Michigan more generally. And education was one of his main concerns.[24]

Around 1806, Father Richard and Angélique Campeau, Elisabeth Williams, and Elisabeth Lyons, created a local Sisterhood that Monique Labadie had also joined by 1815.[25] All four novices were from well-off, or even wealthy merchant and landowning families. Their familial and personal assets provided a much-needed financial support to their Sisterhood and schools, while probably heightening their sense of duty. Angélique Campeau owned a house in Detroit and, when Father Richard failed to fund the construction and use of a school building in exchange for her 13-year-long unpaid housekeeping for him, she herself contributed to the rent of a school.[26] Elisabeth Williams was the daughter of a French-descended mother and a British Father. Her brother, John R., entered a partnership with their maternal uncle, the successful merchant Joseph Campeau, and in turn became a prominent figure as both an affluent merchant and Detroit's multiple-term mayor.[27] In the early 1820s, John R. contributed to the Sisterhood by paying Elisabeth Lyons and Monique Labadie for sewing and might have supplied them with fabric and clothes gratis.[28]

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[24] George Paré, *The Catholic Church in Detroit, 1701-1888* (Detroit: The Gabriel Richard Press, 1951), 255-403 and 582-700; Sister M. Dolorita Mast, *Always the Priest: The Life of Gabriel Richard, s.s.* (Baltimore, Maryland: Helicon Press, 1965); Frank B. Woodford and Albert Hyma, *Gabriel Richard, Frontier Ambassador* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1958).

[25] PD to MSB, October 8, 1818 in *PDOC*, 405; Gabriel Richard, Minutes of a Meeting between Gabriel Richard and a group of local women re: the establishment of religious school, 1815, French, Box 1, Folder 16, Archives of the Archdiocese of Detroit, Detroit, Michigan (hereafter AAD).

[26] For Campeau's house see Elisabeth Williams to John R. Williams, June 6, 1815, Box 4, John R. Williams Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, MI (hereafter BHC); Angélique Campeau, Account for boarding Elisabeth Williams, June 1817, Box 5, John R. Williams Papers, BHC. For her unpaid work and funding of a school building see Gabriel Richard, Account between Gabriel Richard and Angélique Campeau, September 1, 1822, Archdiocese of Detroit Collection (hereafter DET), Archives of the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN (hereafter UNDA); Gabriel Richard, Promise to Pay to Angelique Campeau, September 20, 1822, DET, UNDA; Account between Charles Larned and the School of Ste Marie, Financial Records, 1813-1838, p. 40, Box 2, Folder 3, Ste. Anne Detroit Parish Collection, AAD.

[27] Rosalita, *Education in Detroit*, 71; Christian Denissen, *Genealogy of the Detroit River Region, 1701-1936* (Detroit Society for Genealogical Research, 1987), 1263-1264; "List of Mayors of Detroit," in *Shove's Business Advertiser, and Detroit Directory for 1852-53* (Detroit: Free Press Book, 1852), 41.

From its inception, the Sisterhood's purpose was to promote the education of French-descended girls of the Detroit River region. No public system of education existed in Detroit or the Michigan Territory before 1833, so schools were private enterprises undertaken at families' expense.[29] From 1806 through the 1830s the four Sisters were involved in multiple teaching enterprises in and near Detroit.[30] While the schools were unstable, who and what the Sisters taught was more consistent. Scattered evidence shows that they taught French-descended girls. "[F]emale," "females," and "girls" always describe the schools and students in English writings and in French ones they are in the feminine. A few Anglo-American parents might have sent their daughters to the Sisters' schools. But in all likelihood, Elisabeth Williams's French-descended students—the daughters of her uncle Barnabé Campeau, her niece Catherine, the seventeen daughters of River Clinton's "*habitan[t]s*"[31] (the people of French ancestry), and the 40 girls of the *French* Female Charity School—were representative of the majority of her pupils.[32] This short-lived Catholic Sisterhood is largely forgotten, and evidence regarding it is scarce and scattered.[33] But despite its ultimate dissolution, the Sisterhood shows that young French-descended women seized the opportunity of religious life to embrace a public role and serve their community as teachers.[34]

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[28] Account between John R. Williams and Elisabeth Lyons for sewing, April 13, 1822, Box 8, John R. Williams Papers, BHC; Account between John R. Williams and Elisabeth Lyons for sewing, April 9, 1824, Box 9, John R. Williams Papers, BHC. Elisabeth Williams asked her brother for free supplies but it is unclear whether or not he complied. Elisabeth Williams to John R. Williams, January 30, 1821, Box 7, John R. Williams Papers, BHC.
[29] Clarence Burton (ed.), *The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922*, vol. 1, chapter 28 (Detroit: S. J. Clarke Pub. Co, 1922).
[30] Gabriel Richard, Petition to the Legislature of the territory of Michigan, October 1, 1806, October 18, 1808, and March 31, 1820, vol. 1, Gabriel Richard Papers, BHC; Gabriel Richard to Elisabeth Williams, May 25, 1824 and February 16, 1825, Box 1, Gabriel Richard Papers, BHC ; Elisabeth Williams to John R. Williams, June 4, 1815, Box 6, and July 31, 1824, Box 9 and January 24, Box 14, John R. Williams Papers, BHC.
[31] Elisabeth Williams to John R. Williams, July 9, 1825, Box 11, John R. Williams Papers, BHC.
[32] Ibidem and Elisabeth Williams, Reçu Jan [sic] Baptiste Michel, September 16, 1809, French, Folder 1806-1809, Rivard Family Papers, BHC; Account between Barnabé Campau and Elisabeth Williams (French), December 12, 1818, French, Folder 1818, Barnabas Campau Papers, BHC; Julius Mac Cabe, Directory of the City of Detroit, with its Environs, and Register of Michigan, For the Year 1837 (William Harsha, Detroit: 1837), 97.
[33] Paré, The Catholic Church in Detroit, 615-636 and Mary Rosalita, Education in Detroit Prior to 1850 (Lansing, MI: Michigan Historical Commission, 1928), chap. 3.

Due to limitations in their own education, the Sisters' many, short-lived schools offered an elementary course of study. One émigré priest, for example, had provided Angélique Campeau, Elisabeth Williams, and Elisabeth Lyons with their "first education." Father Richard himself had taught the two Elisabeths the "first rudiments of English and Latin languages, and some principles of geometry […] [but] by necessity they have been forced to stop their studies and to become masters and teachers for others."[35] As a result, the Sisters taught the 3Rs as well as domestic skills, such as knitting, sewing, and spinning. Additionally, they probably trained the girls for their first communion, though Father Richard never mentioned it—probably because he was simultaneously petitioning the Michigan legislature for land for the school, and emphasizing the Catholic content of teaching would not have been a compelling argument. Nonetheless, the names of the schools—*Monastery* of St. Marie and *Société des Ecoles Catholiques*—along with the French-descended girls belonging to the Catholic Church illuminate the Catholic dimension of the schooling.[36]

However rudimentary this female education was, the religious stakes were high from the beginning. Through teaching girls, the Sisters formed future Catholic mothers—a principle stressed by both Monique Labadie and fur trader Joseph Bailly's granddaughter. According to Bailly's granddaughter, women learned to write to keep the accounts and they learned to read to use prayer books and teach catechism to their children.[37] When Monique Labadie donated her

[34] Save for Campeau, who was about 40 in 1806, the three other sisters were in their late teens when they joined the Sisterhood and could well have instead chosen to marry. Liste des associés à la Confrairie [sic] Du très Saint Sacrement Etablie dans la paroisse Ste Anne du Détroit St Clair Diocèse de Baltimore, 1805-1832, Box 2, Ste. Anne Detroit Parish Collection, AAD. For an English translation: "La Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement (Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament) 1805-1832: Ste Anne de Detroit," Michigan's Habitant Heritage 31, no. 2 (2010): 1-8.

[35] Gabriel Richard, Petition to the Legislature of the territory of Michigan, October 18, 1808, vol. 1, Gabriel Richard Papers, BHC.

[36] Gabriel Richard, Minutes of a Meeting between Gabriel Richard and a group of local women re: the establishment of religious school, 1815, French, Box 1, Folder 16, AAD; Gabriel Richard, Petition to the Legislature of the territory of Michigan, March 31, 1820, vol. 1, Gabriel Richard Papers, BHC.

house to the Religious of the Sacred Heart in 1851, she required that orphan girls "be appropriately educated and fitted to accomplish their duties in the World as good and Christian wives, mothers, and housekeepers."[38] Far from innovative, the French-speaking educational plan carried out the principles of the Catholic Reformation that made women the main instrument of propagating the faith and the cornerstone of a truly Catholic society.[39] If Catholicism was to survive the influx of Anglo-American and other Protestants, girls' instruction was a means to achieve this goal.

In addition to these religious stakes, there were political and economic stakes attached to education. If they were to retain their place in Detroit's life, the French-descended needed to educate their children. This heightened their sense of urgency to develop an educational system. In 1817, a person writing in French as "Vieux Philippe" (Old Philip) issued this warning to the "French of Michigan Territory" in the *Detroit Gazette*: "[Y]ou must begin immediately to give an education to your children. In little time there will be in this territory as many *Yankees* as French, and if you do not instruct your children, all the jobs will be given to the *Yankees*."[40] Whoever issued the warning, at least some members of the French-descended elite embraced it. Obviously concerned with declension and her family's status, Elisabeth Williams entreated her brother John R. to pay for the education of their sister's daughter for fear that she would end up being a cook, rather than having an "honorable"[41] position. Elisabeth might have wanted her niece to become a teacher like her.

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[37] Howe, *The Story of a French Homestead*, 58.
[38] Certified copy of Indenture between Antoine and Monique Beaubien and Aloysia Hardey, April 19, 1851, Box 6, Series V C 2, Society of the Sacred Heart, Canadian and United States Province Archives, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA).
[39] Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 8, 29.
[40] Vieux Philippe, "EDUCATION," *Detroit Gazette*, August 8, 1817. I am grateful to Catherine Cangany for bringing this article to my attention.
[41] Elisabeth Williams to John R. Williams, July 9, 1825, Box 11, John R. Williams Papers, BHC. My translation.

Though Anglo-Protestants generally assumed that the francophone character of schools developed out of want to preserve culture, it probably resulted at first from the Sisters' limited language proficiency. There is little doubt that Father Richard's Sisters primarily used French in their schools. Along with Catholic literature—devotional books, catechisms, and the Gospel—, the books that sold the most among Ste Anne parishioners well into the 1820s, and that Father Richard and Elisabeth Lyons restocked while staying on the east coast, were an *abécédaire* (French spelling book) and French grammars.[42] This is not surprising given that the Sisterhood itself was French-speaking. As Elizabeth Williams' British father died before she was born, Elisabeth Lyons was the only Sister who likely grew up in a bilingual family.[43] Therefore, every attempt to merge Father Richard's Sisterhood with a more established one favored Francophone nunneries. And while Anglophone convents existed in the 1820s United States, the two Elisabeths endeavored to join French-speaking Ursulines convents in Quebec and New Orleans.[44] Like fur trader Joseph Bailly, who wished that his daughters learned English, francophone Detroit parents may have requested some English classes. In 1825 Father Richard, solicited (in vain) the Superior of an Anglophone nunnery for a nun with a solid knowledge of the English grammar for his Sisterhood.[45] This last point suggests that French-descended Detroiters were not simply hostile to Detroit's increasing Anglophone character but, as the Sisterhood's schools evince, they were not fully equipped for it.

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[42] Financial Records, 1813-1838, Box 2, Folder 3, Ste. Anne Detroit Parish Collection, AAD. One of the grammar textbooks was Charles Francois Lhomond's *Elements de grammaire francaise*, first published in Paris in 1780 (http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k82630p). Father Richard and Elizabeth Williams both mention this grammar. Elizabeth Williams to John R. Williams, July 31, 1824, Box 9, John R. Williams Papers, BHC; Gabriel Richard to Elizabeth Williams, February 16, 1825, Box 1, Gabriel Richard Papers, BHC.
[43] Denissen, *Genealogy of the Detroit River Region*, 55, 768, 1263-1264.
[44] For the merging projects PD to MSB, October 8, 1818 *PDOC,* vol. 1., 405; Gabriel Richard to Elisabeth Williams, May 25, 1824, Box 1, Gabriel Richard Papers, BHC. Due to the Sisterhood's financial instability, Elisabeth Lyons and Elisabeth Williams temporarily left Detroit to join other nunneries but quickly came back to Detroit. Sœur de St Joseph Laclotte, Certificat re: Elisabeth Lyons, May 11, 1824 (French), Elisabeth Lyons Papers, BHC; John R. Williams to Thomas Clark, June 24, 1822, Draft, Box 8, John R. Williams Papers, BHC; Gabriel Richard to Elisabeth Williams, May 25, 1824, Box 1, Gabriel Richard Papers, BHC.
[45] Gabriel Richard to Elisabeth Williams, February 16, 1825, Box 1, Gabriel Richard Papers, BHC.

But as French-descended Detroiters became a minority, the stakes of French-speaking education shifted; French-language conservation increasingly became an explicit goal. Monique Labadie's involvement in education best evidences this Francophone resilience. At an unknown date, she left the sisterhood and in 1829, at age 41, married Antoine Beaubien.[46] The couple's one child died in infancy, so Monique Labadie decided to devote her wealth and energy to promote free French-speaking education. Between 1837 and 1839, and possibly before and beyond, Elisabeth Williams was superintendent of the *French* Female Charity School funded by "Mrs. Antoine Beaubien,"[47] that is Monique Labadie. And at the end of the 1840s, the Beaubiens convinced the Religious of the Sacred Heart to create an orphanage and an academy in Detroit. In the indenture, the Beaubiens required that the Religious of the Sacred Heart "received into [their orphanage] […] a convenient number of the female children of French descent." Further, if the nuns could teach the English language, French should be the "chief language of the institution," which "shall forever remain under Roman Catholic Government, Supervision, and order."[48] The Beaubiens must have chosen the Religious of the Sacred Heart on purpose as French was the dominant language of their community, even in the United States.

It is remarkable that the growing emphasis on the French language roughly coincided with the advent of public education in Michigan in the 1830s. Up to the mid-1830s, only middling to well-off French-descended families could afford to send their daughters to Francophone, paying schools.[49] By contrast, the schools created thanks to Monique Labadie's generosity were fully funded, including the textbooks. Therefore, by the late 1830s, girls of

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[46] Acte de mariage entre Antoine Beaubien et Monique Labadie (French), Ste Anne Church Register, vol. 4, p. 1914-1915, BHC; Denissen, *Genealogy of the Detroit River Region*, 55.
[47] Mac Cabe, *Directory of the City of Detroit*, 97.
[48] Certified copy of Indenture between Antoine and Monique Beaubien and Aloysia Hardey, April 19, 1851, Box 6, Series V C 2, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.
[49] Elisabeth Williams to John R. Williams, July 9, 1825, August 21, 1826 and September 23, 1827, John R. Williams Papers, BHC.

modest families and even orphans could receive the same rudimentary education then available in public schools, while also retaining the Catholic faith and French language at the core of the French culture.[50] By obtaining that the Religious of the Sacred Heart establish a school in Detroit, Monique Labadie helped Detroit French-speaking education to thrive until 1886. True to their promise, the Ladies of the Sacred Heart taught orphans in French and had a separate Francophone class for French-descended girls in their free school. Both groups also received a careful Catholic instruction.[51]

In sum, along with the work of Father Richard's Sisters, Monique's largesse demonstrates that Francophone women of Detroit were the backbone of French-speaking female education and, in this way, contributed to the French community's resilience in the face of its growing numerical marginalization. Contrary to Anglophone stereotypes of French-descended as illiterate and passive, they could fend for themselves by creating their own schools.

At the same time, the coming of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Detroit induced the diversification and broader reach of French female education. There, like in other western towns, the French-style education of the Sacred Heart academies appealed to parents of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. And the Sacred Heart was not alone. After 1818, French missionary nuns in the Midwest contributed to the growth of French cultural influences, especially among US middle and upper class- females, to the extent that Protestant educators and ministers considered convent schools as a major threat to the Anglo-Protestant nation they sought to build.

[50] Mac Cabe, *Directory of the City of Detroit*, 97. Certified copy of Indenture between Antoine and Monique Beaubien and Aloysia Hardey, April 19, 1851, Box 6, Series V C 2, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.
[51] House Journal Detroit, July 7, 1858, July 7, 1861, and June 28, 1863 ; Le Détroit, *Lettres Annuelles*, 1852-1853, 1856-1858 ; M. C. Wheeler, Notes on the History of the Society of the Sacred Heart in Detroit, March 27, 1983, Box 3, Series V C 1, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.

French-Style Education: French-born Nuns and the "Refinement" of the West (1818-1860)

It is at the same time startling and unsurprising that many Anglo-Americans in the West appreciated what, in their understanding, French-born nuns contributed to the frontier and its citizens—a thorough education, fine manners and landscapes. This positive reception resulted from the wider reach of "refinement." As historian Richard L. Bushman aptly demonstrated, in the first half of the 19th century "refinement" spread outside of the genteel class downward to the middle-class.[52] Bushman's illuminating focus on white Anglo-American Protestant men of the east coast, however, obscures many aspects of the story of American refinement. French sisterhoods like the Religious of the Sacred Heart and the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were major actors in the refinement of the West, who migrated to the United States with their educational models, learning, books, and even with their pianos. Including French-born nuns in the narrative, however, makes it surprising because it complicates the oft-told story of antebellum anti-Catholicism and anti-convent culture.[53]

To fully understand how French nuns came to play a major role in the "refinement" of the West necessitates to explore their background, especially how they helped to energize the post-revolutionary rise of female secondary education in France. Historian Rebecca Rogers demonstrated that the French Revolution and 19th-century French cultural, social, and political changes triggered an unprecedented growth of private secondary schools for middle- and upper-class girls.[54] The destruction of French female religious orders and their convent schools in the 1790s let a void that both lay women and nuns filled after 1800 by rebuilding and, above all,

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[52] Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, xi-xix and 205-447.
[53] For the historiography of antebellum America's focus on anti-Catholicism and the anti-convent culture see note 15 above.
[54] Except for the handful of public Légion d'Honneur schools founded by Napoleon, there was no public secondary education for girls in France prior to 1880 when the Republicans voted what is known as the Camille Sée law.

creating new schools. That middle- and upper-class women needed to be well educated and in schools rather than at home was a belief resulting from the reconfiguration of gender relations and family in the wake of the French Revolution. Like the United States, post-revolutionary France limited French women's rights while allowing for a growing female influence within the family and society. The idea that women's role within the family would contribute to the regeneration of the French society led to the growing consensus that girls' education was key to this regeneration. As importantly, Rogers masterfully showed that, from the outset, French nuns were major actors of this development and were much better educated than historians of France have long argued.[55]

While the French Revolution and its aftermath fueled the female academy movement in France, the American Revolution similarly induced the rise of female secondary in the United States, leaving some room for well-prepared French nuns. US historians of women and education have shown that support for advanced education for middling and elite white women skyrocketed in the early national period. Championing women as the cornerstone of an educated citizenry, the ideology of Republican Motherhood was one main argument in favor of women's education.[56] This movement led to the dramatic growth of female academies—from one before the Revolution to hundreds of them by the 1850s—and the increasing breadth of the curriculum at these schools.[57] By the eve of the US Civil War, the Sisters of Providence and the Religious of

[55] Rogers, *From the Salon to the* Schoolroom, see especially introduction, chaps. 1, 2, and 5, and 83-84, 90-95. The foundational work on how the French Revolution reshaped the French family order is Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California, 2004).
[56] Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 7-32 and 185-288; Barbara Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 1-42. For an analysis of additional reasons for the development of the female academy movement see Margaret Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), especially 15-33, 53-76.
[57] Thomas Woody points out that the only institution resembling early national academies in what became the United States was the New Orleans Ursulines convent school. Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the*

the Sacred Heart (among other French Sisterhoods) had significantly contributed to this growth, as they ran over a dozen young ladies' academies. Most of their convent schools were in the West because, as chapters 1 and 2 show, these two sisterhoods answered the call of French-born bishops—Louis Dubourg and Célestin de la Hailandière—at the head of dioceses whose oldest Catholics were French-descended settlers. While the Religious of the Sacred Heart, who first came to Missouri in 1818, opened academies throughout the Midwest, Louisiana, and even in east coast cities, the Sisters of Providence confined themselves to the Diocese of Vincennes (roughly corresponding to the state of Indiana).[58]

As the bishops who recruited them knew, the Religious of the Sacred Heart and the Sisters of Providence were well suited to meeting the rising US expectations for female education, being among the first new religious orders created in the Napoleonic era with the explicit aim of regenerating—that is re-Christianizing—France through girls' education.[59] Founded by Madeleine-Sophie Barat with the support of Jesuits in 1800, the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus specialized, as prescribed in its rule, in educating the daughters of the elite.

United States (New York, Octagon Books, 1966), vol. 1, 329-330. Margaret Nash asserts that there were hundreds of female academies in antebellum America. Nash studied a sample of 129, none of them convent academies. Historians of US Catholicism agreed that there were just over 200 convent academies by 1860. Nash, *Women's Education*, 5, 117-121; Joseph Mannard, "Protestant Mothers and Catholic Sisters: Gender Concerns in Anti-Catholic Conspiracy Theories, 1830-1860," *American Catholic Studies* 111, no. 1 (2000): 4; Oates, "Catholic Female Academies on the Frontier," 121. For the increasing breadth of the curriculum see Woody, *A History of Women's Education*, vol. 1, 409-422 and Nash, *Women's Education*, 35-49.

[58] Callan, *The Society of the Sacred Heart*. The Sisters of Providence opened academies in Terre Haute, Vincennes, Madison, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis. The Academy of Terre Haute was the only academy for day students only, probably due to its proximity with St. Mary-of-the-Woods. The other Academies were open to boarders too, but Mother Theodore's Journal shows that 10% of the students at most were boarders. MTG, Journal Abrégé des Evénements (hereafter Journal), May 1853, December 1853, May 1854, June 1854, SMWA ; "ST. VINCENT'S ACADEMY, Terre Haute," *Wabash Courier*, January 20, 1849; "ST MARY'S FEMALE ACADEMY AT VINCENNES" and "YOUNG LADIES' ACADEMY, MADISON, INDIANA," *Catholic Almanac for 1847*, 115-116 ; "The University of Notre Dame du Lac," *The Indiana Gazetteer, or Topographical Dictionary of the State of Indiana* (Indianapolis: E. Chamberlain, 1850), 54. Possibly because the University of Notre Dame and the Sisters of Providence's Academies were all Catholic, the author of the Gazetteer (wrongly) considered all of these schools as part of the same institution.

[59] Rogers shows that the emphasis on the need for religious regeneration was common to lay and religious schools and widespread in public discourses. French nuns were not exceptional, but their status provided them with additional credibility for this task. Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom,* 25-35, 50, 84, 90-95, 136.

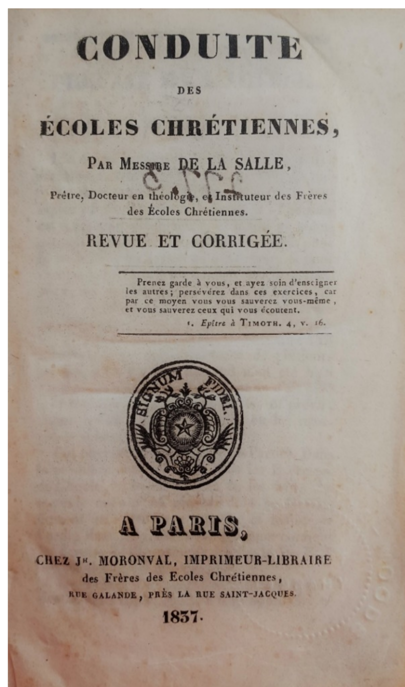
This focus resulted from the belief that upper-class women exerted a greater influence on society than other women and, therefore, were the pillar of a Catholic society. By contrast, the Sisters of Providence (created in 1806) had a lesser emphasis on boarding school education than the Religious of the Sacred Heart. Observed by both the French and US Sisters of Providence, the *Rule* insisted that the goal of the order was to "honor the divine Providence […] through the devotion to girls' instruction"[60] and provided that the Sisters would take a special fourth vow to that end in addition to the three traditional vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty.[61] While the *Rule* insisted that each house should have classes for "poor" children, it stated that the Superior General would decide which houses would also open an academy for young ladies of wealthy families.

Along with their teaching experience, the French nuns imported pedagogical model and material to the United States. Despite the ocean separating the nuns, the Society of the Sacred Heart, whose Mother House and Superior General were in France, maintained an institutional and pedagogical uniformity. This entailed that all the academies of the Sacred Heart followed the same *Plan d'études* (plan of education) and *Règlement des Pensionnats* (school rules), whose earlier versions were painstakingly copied by hand and shipped across the Atlantic and, after 1852, printed (fig. 1 and 2 at the end of document). Therefore, whether they were in France or in the United States, the students received a standardized education. The Sisters of Providence had no such plan of education or principle of uniformity. Sister Theodore Guérin, the Superior of the US mission, had the power to design the US schools' curriculum. Aged 42 when St Mary's opened in 1841, Mother Theodore brought from France her teaching experience as well as an

[60] *Constitutions et règles des Sœurs de la Providence de Ruillé-sur-Loir, Diocèse du Mans* (Le Mans : Monnoyer, 1835), 1. My translation. The original reads, « La fin que se propose la Congrégation est d'honorer la divine Providence, de la seconder dans ses vues miséricordieuses sur les hommes, en se dévouant à l'instruction des jeunes filles […]. »
[61] *Ibid.*, 2.

1837 Parisian edition of Frenchman Jean-Baptiste de la Salle's *Conduite des Écoles Chrétiennes* (1706) whose principles the French and US Sisters of Providence implemented in all their schools (fig. 3). But she also likely imitated the ways of other US and France's convent schools where she stayed during her various trips, thus creating an organic, unique curriculum.[62]

Fig. 2. Mother Theodore Guérin's copy of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, *Conduite des Ecoles Chrétiennes* (1837)



CONDUITE

DES

ÉCOLES CHRÉTIENNES,

PAR MESSIRE DE LA SALLE,

Prêtre, Docteur en théologie, et Instituteur des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes.

REVUE ET CORRIGÉE.

Prenez garde à vous, et ayez soin d'enseigner les autres; persévérez dans ces exercices, car par ce moyen vous vous sauverez vous-même, et vous sauverez ceux qui vous écoutent.

1. Epître à TIMOTH. 4, v. 16.

A PARIS,

CHEZ Jh. MORONVAL, IMPRIMEUR-LIBRAIRE des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes,

RUE GALANDE, PRÈS LA RUE SAINT-JACQUES.

1837.

[62] Brown, *The Sisters of Providence*, 158-162, 165; Sister Mary Theodosia Mug, *Life and Life-Work of Mother Theodore Guérin, Foundress of the Sisters of Providence at St Mary-of-the-Woods, Vigo County, Indiana* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1904), 72-98; Pensionnat des Sœurs de Charité de la Providence de Ruillé-sur-Loir, Prospectus, June 22, 1840, SMWA; First Journal of Travel, in Mother Theodore Guérin, *Journals and Letters* (hereafter *MTGJL*), ed. and trans. Sister Mary Theodosia Mug (1937; repr.., Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, 2005), 42-43, 49-52; MTG to Mother Marie Lecor, September 25, 1843 ; SFX to Mr. Le Fer, August 8, 1841, SFX to Mme Le Fer, September 12 and 13, 1841, SFX to Pépa Le Fer, October 3, 1841, in Clémentine de La Corbinière and Irma Le Fer de La Motte, *Une Femme Apôtre ou Vie et lettres d'Irma Le Fer de La Motte En religion sœur François-Xavier* (Paris : V. Lecoffre, 1879), 216-218, 226-235.

Credit: Sisters of Providence Archives, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods IN

While both approaches would prove successful and help the two religious orders meet the increasingly high standards of US female academy education, the French origins of the sisterhoods and many of the sisters themselves was the main characteristic that set them apart from other female academies—a significant advantage given the prestige associated with France among US middle- and upper-classes. Most evidently, historians of US women's secondary education have established that all-female schools "frequently offered instruction in French."[63] Additionally, non-French academies made "frequent references to a French model or to French institutions"[64] in their prospectuses and advertisements to appeal to more broadly Francophile middle- and upper-classes. For instance, in 1827 the Irish nuns of the Visitation who ran an academy in Georgetown, D. C. offered courses in "domestic economy, comprising the various exercises in Pastry and the culinary art, laundry, pantry and dairy inspection etc as conducted at the Academy of Saint Denis Banlieue de Paris."[65] In the same vein, some teachers and principals named their school "French and English" female academy to build up their credentials.[66] Some wealthy parents even sent their offspring across the Atlantic to attend boarding schools in France. For the period 1852-1860, 15% of foreign students in French boarding schools were Americans—the second nationality behind the British.[67] John Mullanphy, a wealthy Irish-born Catholic of St. Louis, was a case in point. As the Religious of the Sacred Heart were about to

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[63] For the quote: Nash, *Women's Education*, 46. See also Woody, *A History of Women's Education*, vol. 1, 412.
[64] Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, 245.
[65] Reproduced in Barbara Misner, *"Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies": Catholic Women Religious in America, 1790-1850* (New York: Garland Press, 1988), 273. The French Academy to which this prospectus refers is the female school of the Légion d'Honneur created at Napoleon's request in 1805.
[66] There was at least one in St. Louis in 1831 and one in Philadelphia in 1833. Baumgarten, "Education and Democracy in Frontier St. Louis": 183; "Young Ladies' French and English Academy," *Catholic Almanac* (1833), 107-108.
[67] Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, 169.

establish their first academy in Missouri, he sent his four daughters to a French Sacred Heart boarding school in the late 1810s and early 1820s.[68]

The Religious of the Sacred Heart and the Sisters of Providence benefited from French education's cachet, though they used it to promote their schools in different ways. From the first, the Ladies of the Sacred Heart's Francophone character was their key selling point. In antebellum America, most female academies offered French lessons and charged for it, so making them mandatory and free was a way for the Religious of the Sacred Heart to distinguish themselves from rival academies, whether lay, Protestant, or Catholic. As time passed and more academies opened in the West, the Religious of the Sacred Heart also emphasized the superior quality of the French language taught at the Sacred Heart. In Detroit, the 1853 prospectus boasted that "The FRENCH LANGUAGE [is] universally spoken"[69] and the 1863 prospectus that "[e]special pains are taken in the instruction of the PURE PARISIAN FRENCH."[70] Both selling points were true. While in 1853 the Detroit Mother Superior, Madame Verhulst, had trouble training an English-speaking novice because the Sisters did all the exercises in French, the Superior for the years 1859-1867, Eugénie Desmarquest, was born and raised in Amiens, close to Paris, and had lived in Paris for a few years.[71]

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[68] PD to MSB, June 7, 1818, November 15, 1819, April 1821, and December 1, 1822 in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 353, 475, 561, 646; PD to Mère de Gramont, October 15, 1833, in *PDOC*, vol. 2, 202.

[69] "Prospectus of the Young Ladies' Academy Conducted by the Ladies of the Sacred Heart," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, August 25, 1853.

[70] "Academy of the Sacred Heart," *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1863—4* (Detroit, 1863), Detroit Advertisement 17.

[71] For the free, mandatory French lessons at the Sacred Heart: "Young Ladies' Academy at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, St. Louis, Mo.," in *Catholic Almanac*, 1833, 103; "Young Ladies' Academy, Conducted by the Ladies of the Institute of the Sacred Heart, St Louis, Mo.," in *Catholic Almanac*, 1844, 103-105; "Prospectus of the Young Ladies' Academy Conducted by the Ladies of the Sacred Heart," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, August 25, 1853; "Academy of the Sacred Heart," *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1863—4* (Detroit, 1863), Detroit Advertisement 17. For paying French lessons in rival Catholic academies: "Convent, Academies, &c. for Young Ladies," *Catholic Almanac*, 1833, 84-108; "Young Ladies' Academy of the Visitation, at Kaskaskia, Illinois," *Catholic Almanac*, 1837, 135-138. For paying French lessons in non-Catholic rival academies: "Detroit Ladies' Academy," in James Dale Johnston, *Johnston's Detroit Directory and Business for 1853-1854* (Detroit: John Pomroy), 306; "Detroit Female Seminary," *Detroit Free Press*, September 4, 1859. Stanislas Verhulst to

The centralized character of the Society of Sacred Heart helped maintain the Francophone character of their convents and academies well beyond the founding years. Between 1822 and the 1850s, the Superior General (Madeleine-Sophie Barat) sent dozens of French-born sisters to the United States and, after 1840, she also regularly sent a Visitatrix, whose role was to help enforce uniformity throughout the Sacred Heart network.[72] When the Detroit Sisters neglected to have their students speak French daily over the break, the Visitatrix scolded them, stressing that parents expected their daughters to practice their French-speaking skills daily.[73] Noticeably, even as Anglophone nuns became the majority of the US Sacred Heart nuns in the 1830s, the Sacred Heart remained heavily Francophone. Mary Elliott, a recent convert who attended the New York Sacred Heart Academy in the late 1850s, found it "curious that almost none of the French nuns ever learned to speak English. Some of them had been in America many years, yet knew but a few commonest words."[74] Indeed, French-born nuns frequently complained about their mediocre English skills and alumnae remembered that Philippine Duchesne, the US foundress, spoke "very little and very broken English."[75]

Madeleine-Sophie Barat, March 7, 1853, Folder 2 Province of New-York, Detroit, C-IV, AGSSC. *Lettres Annuelles*, 1877 (on Eugénie Desmarquest).

[72] For the Visitatrix see Callan, *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, 253-266. For a list of the European (overwhelmingly French) Sisters sent to North America between 1818 and 1849 see *Ibid.*, 781-782. Callan's list includes 55 European sisters. For an updated, exhaustive list (that also includes the Sisters who founded missions in Latin America) see Marie-Louise Martinez (dir.), *Southward Ho!: The Society of the Sacred Heart Enters "Lands of the Spanish Sea," 1853…* (St. Louis: Society of the Sacred Heart, 2003), 161-164.

[73] Anna du Rousier, Détroit : Mémorial de la Visite de la Supérieure Vicaire faite en Juin 1853, Folder 2, Province of New-York, Detroit, C-IV, AGSSC.

[74] Mary Elliott, "School Days at the Sacred Heart," *Putnam's Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and National Interests*, March 1870, 285 (for the quote). The Register of Boarders of Manhattanville is no longer extent but the teachers Elliott mentions as well as a reference to the newspaper cover of Dr Buell's assassination (January 1857) suggest that she was a border at Manhattanville in the mid- to late 1850s. Catalogue de la Société du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus, 1855-1856, 142-143, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.

[75] For French-born Religious of the Sacred Heart complaining about their own English see, for instance, PD to MSB, June 22, 1818, February 15, 1819, PD to Mère Maillucheau, November 20, 1820, all in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 361, 430, 532; Catherine Thiéfry to MSB, December 31, 1829, in Lettres de la Haute Louisiane, II, 1823-1830, Series C-III, Box 1, AGSSC; Catherine Thiéfry to MSB and Eugénie Audé, March 31, 1835, Series C-VII-2 I, Envelope Catherine Thiéfry, AGSSC. On Philippine Duchesne's broken English: E. M. La Motte, Notes on Venerable Mother

But as Elliott also conceded with a great deal of humor and self-mockery, she and most Anglophone students made stunning headway in French at the Sacred Heart. On her first day, Elliott, who regarded herself as a "capital French scholar"[76] because she had learned French grammar and tongue twisters in Protestant seminaries, could not understand a basic question from one of the Francophone sisters. However, she soon became fluent as, "[a]t breakfast, if we could not speak French, closed lips were our portion; and didn't we hurry to unseal them!"[77] Parents who could read French measured their daughters' progress in French and penmanship through the weekly letters they sent from the Academy. William Carr Lane, a prominent physician and St. Louis first mayor, enrolled his two daughters, Ann and Sarah, to St. Louis Sacred Heart Academy in the late 1820s and early 1830s. He carefully kept a few of their French letters, proudly recording on one of them, "[t]his is the 1st letter Ann ever wrote in her life."[78] [79]

While the Religious of the Sacred Heart stressed their institutes' superior French, advertisements for the academies of the Sisters of Providence, especially St Mary's—their most prestigious academy—were surprisingly quiet about these institutions' French quality. Published in 1841, the first prospectus noted the presence of "tutoresses […] natives of […] France."[80] Rather than a guarantee of the French teaching quality, however, the Sisters hoped that Francophone parents would feel comfortable sending their children to St. Mary's. In fact, the advertisement strove to appeal to a broad audience in an Anglophone, Germanophone, and

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Duchesne (for the quote); Mary Ann Rourke Cartan, Recollections of Venerated Mother Duchesne and the Sacred Heart Convent of St. Louis, 1910, both in Series I D, 1 b, Box 1, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.

[76] Elliott, "School Days at the Sacred Heart," 275.

[77] *Ibid*, 277.

[78] Ann Lane to William Carr Lane, May 20, 1828, William Carr Lane Papers, Box 1, Missouri Historical Society, St Louis (hereafter MHS).

[79] The weekly letters are mentioned in *Règlement des Pensionnats et Plan d'études de la Société du Sacré-Cœur* (1852), 90. For the letters that Ann and Sarah sent to their father see Ann Lane to William Carr Lane, May 20, 1828; Sarah Lane to William Carr Lane, 1829 and March 2, 1829, all in William Carr Lane Papers, Box 1, MHS.

[80] Convent and Academy of the Sisters of Providence, October 9, 1841, SMWA.

Francophone region, and sandwiched the French-born teachers between the US- and German-born ones.[81] Save for one prospectus for the Academy of Madison, Indiana, boasting that French was "taught by a Sister, native of France,"[82] 1840s and 1850s prospectuses made no mention of the French origins of the teachers, which might have resulted in part from the fear of nativist attacks against the Sisters and their academies. In 1842, just one year after the opening of St. Mary's, a fire burned to the ground the farmhouse with the yearly provisions of grain for people and stock alike. Whether Protestants had any responsibility is unclear but, importantly, Mother Theodore, who knew about the infamous burning of the Charlestown convent, was convinced it was an arson committed by neighboring Protestants. Downplaying French-born Sisters along with the word "convent" might have alleviated anti-Catholic and xenophobic hostility.[83]

More likely, however, the Sisters of Providence deemphasized their French and Francophone character because, compared to the Religious of the Sacred Heart, it was less prominent within the community. Just three years after the founding of the US community, Mother Theodore and the Superiors of France decided to sever some institutional ties, creating separate French and US communities (but maintaining close connections to this day).[84] Only three French sisters—all relatives of the foundresses—came to the US after 1844.[85] While all

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[81] Ibid.
[82] "Young Ladies' Academy, Madison, Indiana," in *Catholic Almanac for 1847* (Baltimore: F. Lucas, 1847), 116.
[83] There is much literature on the burning of the Charlestown Covent. Jeanne Hamilton, "The Nunnery as Menace: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14, no. 1 (1996), 35-65 ; Ray Allen Billington, "The Burning of the Charlestown Convent," *New England Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1937), 4-24 and *The Protestant Crusade*, 53-117; Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, especially 1-193; Schultz, *Fire &* Roses; Daniel A. Cohen, "Passing the Torch: Boston Firemen, 'Tea Party' Patriots and the Burning of the Charlestown Convent," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 4 (2004), 527-586. The burning of the barn and Mother Theodore's suspicions of Protestants' responsibilities are in MTG to Mother Marie Lecor, October 3, 1842, SMWA; MTG to Bishop Jean-Baptist Bouvier, December 6, 1842, SMWA; MTG, Journal, October 2, 1842 and October 2, 1845, SMWA.
[84] Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*, 258-272. The French Community is called Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir and the US Sisters are the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.
[85] *Ibid*., 270. The Sisters who came from France after the separation were Elvire (Sister Mary Joseph) Le Fer (Sister St. Francis Le Fer's sister) in 1852 And Mother Theodore's two nieces who arrived in 1854. MTG, Journal, October 18, 1852, June, October 16, and December 1854, SMWA.

19th-century Religious of the Sacred Heart had to learn French and all Sacred Heart official correspondence and documents were in French, the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were always a multilingual community, embracing English as their common language. The Religious of the Sacred Heart called each other "*Madame,*" "*Mère*" (Mother), or "*Sœur*"[86] (Sister), even in the United States. By contrast, even the French-born Sisters of Providence called their Superior General "Mother" Theodore.[87]

Though the heavily Francophone character was unique to the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, ubiquitous reminders of the Sisters of Providence's French origins gave them a distinctive French character. Between 1841 and her death in 1856, parents and their daughters met with Mother Theodore, who welcomed them with her imperfect English, prior to enrolling at St Mary's. After 1844, they would have seen in the parlor the portrait of French Queen Amelia that the Queen herself offered Mother Theodore after the two women met in Paris in 1843. Once at the Academy, the students heard stories from the French sisters about their roots and families. Sister Saint Francis Le Fer's parents adopted the students as their grand-daughters and regularly sent them letters and boxes filled with French dolls and other toys and gifts. A successful printer, Alfred Mame of Tours (western France), also offered the Sisters and their students magnificent books. The Sisters redistributed these French toys, books, and other gifts as awards at the bi-annual distributions of premiums, a tradition they shared with the Ladies of the Sacred Heart

[86] The US Sacred Heart Academies prospectus usually referred to the Mother Superior as "Madame X". In the *Lettres Annuelles de la Société du Sacré Coeur*, the Society's newsletter published in French only, the Religious of the Sacred Heart systematically used French titles. In the thousands pages I read in the archives, I found only two letters circulating within the Society in English. These are letters sent by Eleanor Grey, an Irish-born nun who was St Louis Superior in the 1840s. Interestingly only her first two reports to the Superior General were in English, she then switched to French.

[87] Mother Theodore entrusted the French-born Sister Saint Francis Le Fer to keep the community's Journal when she was away of St Mary's and, though Sister St Francis wrote in French, she systematically mentioned the Superior General as *Mother* Theodore. Besides, in one of her French letters to her family, she recreates a dialogue at St Mary's and keeps the English titles of "Sister" and "Mother." SFX to Mme de la Valette, nd, in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 294-295.

who also benefitted from the generosity of their French relations (fig. 4 at the end of the document).[88] In 1845, one St Mary's student was excited to inform her former schoolmate, "I cannot help telling you what I got for one of my premiums. You remember a little workbox that Sister Basilide's sister sent her from France? Well, I got that. You might be sure it is doubly dear to me, having come from Sister B. [Basilide]."[89] As this letter shows, the students could not escape the French background of St Mary's.

Reminiscences evidence the attractiveness of the teaching nuns' French origins. At St Mary's, the Sisters of Providence proudly exhibited their Breton regional identity. Herself from Brittany, Sister St. Francis Le Fer happily reported to her family that, during the annual commencement, students wore Breton costumes for a play and that the audience marveled at the sight of a Breton headdress (*coiffe cancalaise*). Brittany was a heavily rural region and, except for the Le Fers, most French Sisters of Providence were from less prominent families than the Religious of the Sacred Heart or the Ursulines. Therefore, some elitist Indiana French-born priests initially scorned the Sisters of Providence as "a lot of country girls who could not be employed except to teach country children."[90] But, perhaps unaware of Brittany's rustic reputation, US parents and students lauded the French Sisters' fine manners. Jane Brown, a Catholic who attended St Mary's in the early 1840s recalled, "I was at once completely won by her [Mother Theodore's] amiable manners. She manifested an exquisitely simple cordiality, but when occasion required, she could be a queen in dignity."[91] Novelist Booth Tarkington, whose

[88] For Mother Theodore's imperfect English see Mother Anastasie Brown, "Reminiscences," in *The Aurora*, vol. 45. Quoted in Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*, 168. For the portrait of the French Queen see MTG, Second Journal of Travel, in *MTGJL*, 117-121 and Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*, 522. Sister St. Francis and Mother Theodore both mention the objects sent by their French families and friends. La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 268, 294-299 and MTG, Journal, SMWA. For the Religious of the Sacred Heart see, for instance : PD to Mère Maillucheau, August 29, 1818, PD to Louis Barat, March 20, 1820, both in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 385, 498.
[89] *The Indianapolis Star*, January 9, 1937 (the letter reproduced in the newspaper is dated November 8, 1845). Quoted in Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*, 518-519.
[90] Father Martin's words were repeated by Mother Theodore. MTG to Mother Marie Lecor, February 26, 1842, SMWA. The translation is Sister Mary Borromeo Brown's.

mother Elizabeth Booth attended St Mary's from 1844 through 1848, believed that Sister Mary Cecilia—Eleanor Bailly, the daughter of fur trader Joseph Bailly—and Sister Basilide "must have been women of exquisite manner as well as distinguished education. […] Something rare and fine was brought from France to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and none of those who were students there remained unaffected by it. For lack of a better word, I must call it 'distinctive'."[92] Such praise certainly echoed that sung by former Sacred Heart boarders. While Mary Ann Rourke claimed that in 1830s St Louis the "nuns were all distinguished [in manner],"[93] Mary Elliott remembered the librarian as a "French lady, with manners courtly *à toute épreuve*."[94] Therefore, to many Americans like these alumnae and their relatives, France was the model of gentility *par excellence* and, in the context of the convent school, it could even be extended to French-descended women like Sister Mary Cecilia Bailly.[95]

Some US students and parents might have exaggerated the uniqueness of the French Sisters, but it is true that French convent education emphasized the acquisition of manners and deportment. Far from regarding manners as a trivial matter, the Religious of the Sacred Heart spelled out the stakes in their prospectuses, explaining that a "TRUE LADY" displayed "the graces and charms of manner."[96] The Sisters of Providence similarly regarded the boarders' "deportment"[97] or "behavior"[98] as a serious matter that figured prominently—always first or

[91] Mother Anastasie Brown, "Reminiscences," in *The Aurora*, vol. 45. Quoted Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*, 168.
[92] Booth Tarkington in *Indianapolis Star*, February 13, 1916. Quoted in Brown, *History of the Sisters of* Providence, 533. Elizabeth Booth is recorded in Catalogue of the Pupils who have been in our Institute, 1841-1870, SMWA.
[93] Mary Ann Rourke Cartan, Recollections of Venerated Mother Duchesne and the Sacred Heart Convent of St. Louis, 1910, Series I D, 1 b, Box 1, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.
[94] Elliott, "School Days at the Sacred Heart," 285.
[95] For the Breton character of the French community see Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*, 1-4. For the Breton headdress and costumes: SFX to Mme Le Fer, n. d., in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 324-325.
[96] "Academy of the Sacred Heart," *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1863—4* (Detroit, 1863), Detroit Advertisement 17.
[97] Bulletin of Mary and Matilda Richardson, ca. 1842, SMWA.
[98] Miss E. Ritchey's Bulletin Female Institute of St. Mary's of the Woods, July 15, 1859, SMWA.

second—on their bulletins. Surely, the highest honors were when the Sisters of Providence praised a boarder's behavior as "ladylike"[99] as was the case of Ellie Lescure in 1861, awarded her the silver cross for correctness and elegance of manner for the week or, even better, the crown for excellent behavior at the annual commencement.[100] In Sacred Heart academies, the highest awards—ribbons and first medal—also rewarded the students who marked themselves out by their piety, politeness, and dutiful observance of the school rules and the Sisters had special prizes for "genteel deportment" and "exemplary conduct."[101]

French sisterhoods imported these reward systems and notions of fine manners and deportment from France. Read at the beginning of each scholastic year, the Sacred Heart school rules identified two main traits distinguishing refined women from less educated people—polite conversation and table manners.[102] The rules do not describe exactly what both entailed, but the Religious of the Sacred Heart used a French manuscript book summarizing the main notions of politeness with long sections on table manners and polite conversation. While the students were required to bring "two silver spoons, a goblet, knife and fork"[103] when they entered the Academy, the section on table manners explained when and how to use them, or not. For instance, when eating one's soup, a person could only use her spoon, could not make any noise or blow on the liquid when it was too hot. The Sisters also imparted to the girls where to look when drinking (down, rather than at one's sides), how to peal a pear, when and how to cut some bread, and

[99] Miss E. Lescure's Bulletin Female Institute of St. Mary's of the Woods, July 2, 1861, SMWA. It is unclear if this student's family name was Lescure or Leseure and the Catalogue of Pupils did not help clarify this matter.
[100] For the silver cross Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*, 524. The crown for excellent behavior is mentioned in accounts of annual commencements. See for instance "Award of Premiums at St. Mary's of the Woods, Aug. 1, 1850," *Wabash Courier*, August 10, 1850.
[101] *Règlement des Pensionnats*, 1852, 54-67; "Convent of the Sacred Heart," *Missouri Republican*, July ?, 1850 (for the quotes). France's Religious of the Sacred Heart sent these ribbons and medals to the US Sisters: PD to MSB, July 9 and August 31, 1818, in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 369, 394.
[102] *Règlement des Pensionnats*, 1852, 15, 31.
[103] "Prospectus of the Young Ladies' Academy Conducted by the Ladies of the Sacred Heart," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, August 25, 1853.

dozens of other rules. Obviously meant for children, the guide also read that giggling without reason could result in a warning for impudence and that a girl throwing bread to her fellow student would be regarded as an "uneducated peasant."[104] The Ladies of the Sacred Heart who first arrived in frontier Missouri were confident in their manners and, by contrast, appalled by their students' lack of propriety. Born in a French bourgeois family and educated in a French convent, Philippine Duchesne was dismayed by boarders blowing their nose in their fingers. When she asked the student to use a tissue, the French nun disdained the piece of fabric as a "rag."[105] In Detroit, the Visitatrix noticed that the students' behavior during the breaks was too common and colloquial, so she enjoined the Sisters to make sure the Rules of the boarding school were better observed.[106] The Sisters' promise to train "true ladies" would have been appealing to parents as many US *ladies'* academies similarly promoted manners and a lady-like behavior.[107]

In the United States, like in France, a "true lady" must also distinguish herself through accomplishments, such as playing the piano or drawing, so the French nuns made painstaking efforts to enable students to learn and practice them. Indeed, finding piano teachers and transporting pianos into the west could be a challenge.[108] When they arrived in Missouri, the Religious of the Sacred Heart, who lacked money, complained that pianos were rare and expensive on the frontier, so the Superior General sent them pianos from France. The matter was

[104] Notions de Politesse, n.d., Library, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.
[105] PD to MSB, October 8, 1818, *PDOC*, vol. 1, 403. The original is « on se mouche avec les doigts ; il a fallu exiger un mouchoir, qui est un torchon.»
[106] Anna du Rousier, Détroit, Mémorial de la Visite de la Supérieure Vicaire faite en Juin 1853, Folder 2 Province of New-York, Detroit, C-IV, AGSSC.
[107] Nash, *Women's Education*, 100-104. For the Sisters of Providence French reward system: Pensionnat des Sœurs de Charité de la Providence de Ruillé-sur-Loir, Prospectus, June 22, 1840, SMWA; Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, *Conduite des Ecoles Chrétiennes* (Paris : Moronval, 1837), 75-82.
[108] For the Sisters of Providence, see Pensionnat des Sœurs de Charité de la Providence de Ruillé-sur-Loir, Prospectus, June 22, 1840, SMWA. For the Religious of the Sacred Heart: Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, 60-62.

so important that it was a recurring topic of the correspondence exchanged between the French and US Religious of the Sacred Heart, and whenever a piano finally arrived, the Sisters deemed it worth recording as a most notable event in the House Journal.[109] Mother Theodore was also obsessed with pianos, frantically recording in her Journal whenever a deal for a new piano was made or cancelled, whenever a piano master arrived at or left (or even once died at) St Mary's, whenever the pianos were tuned, and, of course, whenever a new piano was delivered. At least once, the boarders organized a celebration for the reception of a piano.[110]

The Superiors' anxieties were so high because ornamental branches were key to their academies' success, providing both a greater number of students and important revenues. Philippine Duchesne and Mother Theodore both realized as soon as they arrived in the United States that few parents would send their daughters to their academies without music and piano lessons. As Mother Theodore put it, "no piano, no pupils!"[111] At St Mary's in the 1840s, tuition, boarding, and laundry for a session (5 months) cost $45 but piano and guitar lessons were an extra $15 each and drawing lessons $10, although the prices deterred few parents: most students studied piano and/or drawing. During the academic year 1848-1849, for instance, 70% of the 36 boarders studied the piano and almost half took drawing lessons with Sister St. Francis Le Fer—who had learned the art of drawing and painting with a private tutor in France, brought her notes on oriental painting across the Atlantic, and started giving lessons within a week of her arrival at St. Mary's.[112] The deep anxieties of Catherine Thiéfry, Superior of the Sacred Heart

[109] PD to MSB, August 31, 1818 and October 8, 1818 in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 394, 404; PD to Louis Barat, September 17, in *Ibid*, vol. 1, 456; PD to Thérèse Maillucheau, September 26, 1819, in *Ibid*, vol. 1, 460; PD, Journal de la Société en Amérique, March 14, 1820, in *Ibid*, vol. 2, 395.
[110] MTG, Journal, SMWA.
[111] MTG, First Journal of Travel, in *MTGJL*, 43.
[112] For the cost: "Female Institute of St. Mary's of the Woods, Near Terre-Haute, Vigo County, Indiana," 1844; Register of the Institute, 1843-1847 and 1848-1853, all in SMWA. For the number of students taking piano and guitar lessons: Register of the Institute, 1848-1853, SMWA. I chose the year 1848-1849 because this is the first with

City House (St. Louis) in 1834-1841, regarding music and drawing reflect the stakes. Catherine Thiéfry feared that opening of the rival Catholic Visitation Academy at Kaskaskia, Illinois in 1833, would put City House out of business because the Visitation nuns had harp and guitar mistresses. Compelled to hire piano and drawing masters due to the dearth of nuns trained in those areas, Catherine Thiéfry lamented that it deprived her convent of significant revenue with half of the boarders (24 out 50) taking piano lessons in 1836.[113]

Students and alumnae's correspondence and reminiscences further evince how central piano skills were, both for them and in French convent schools more generally. Sallie Benbridge, who attended St Mary's in the late 1840s, detailed to her sister Mary (a St Mary's alumna) the new piano pieces she could play and begged her to send additional pieces for "you can get music whenever you want it & I cannot."[114] According to her St Mary's friend Mary Ann, Mary Benbridge herself was "no indifferent performer on the piano."[115] Interestingly, for Mary Ann Rourke, a boarder at Sacred Heart City House in 1833-1837, the emphasis on piano was typically French. "We were under the "French regime[,]" remembered Rourke in her old days, [w]e were taught to make a courtesy [curtsey] as we entered the parlor. A piano was in the pupils' parlor and the pupils took their music with them and played for their parents. We had a musical contest, some taking from professors, others from the nuns. Madame de Kersaint's style was soft, the professors' brilliant."[116]

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comprehensive data. For Sister St Francis Le Fer: Explications de la Peinture Orientale, 1835, Manuscript in SFX's hand, Le Fer Collection and MTG, Journal, November 15 and 21, 1821, both in SMWA; La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 32, 77.

[113] Catherine Thiéfry to MSB, December 15, 1835 (Thiéfry mistakenly dated the letter 1836 but the content makes clear she wrote it in 1835), September 6, 1836, October 8, 1836, and February 2, 1837, Envelope Catherine Thiéfry, Series C VII-2-1, AGSSC.

[114] Sally Benbridge to Mary Benbridge, November 25, 1849, SMWA. The original letter is in the Archives of the Tippecanoe County Historical Association, Lafayette, Indiana.

[115] Mary Ann (probably Caniff) to Mary Benbridge, September 22, 1848, SMWA. The original letter is in the Archives of the Tippecanoe County Historical Association, Lafayette, Indiana.

The French regime's emphasis on the acquisition of ladylike behavior and accomplishments was not at the expense of girls' intellectual training, however. The French nuns were well equipped to impart academic subjects to their students in a context of raising competition for and intellectual standards of secondary female education—much like in France itself.[117] By the mid-nineteenth century, a first-class female seminary in the United States had to offer a thorough course of study, meaning not just the 3Rs, but also geometry, algebra, chemistry, botany, astronomy, natural philosophy, history, geography, literary analysis, rhetoric, and composition. The US Religious of the Sacred Heart accordingly followed the Society's four- and, after 1833, five-year plan of education that laid out for each year what should be taught, what textbooks to assign, and what additional books the sisters should master and use to prepare for their classes.[118] The accounts of boarders who attended St Mary's for two to five years demonstrate that, like, the Religious of the Sacred Heart, the Sisters of Providence added new subjects and textbooks over the course of one's education. Because their *Rule* provided they should work toward meeting the requirements of whatever task the Mother Superior assigned them, the US Sisters of Providence devoted part of their summer breaks to teaching and intellectual skills.[119] Along with accounts of commencements and distributions of premiums, students—like the aforementioned Mary Ann Rourke (Sacred Heart City House, 1837) and

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[116] Mary Ann Rourke Cartan, Recollections of Venerated Mother Duchesne and the Sacred Heart Convent of St. Louis, 1910, Series I D, 1 b, Box 1 (for the quote) and Children's Register City House, 1825-1872, Series IV N 1, Box 1 (for Mary Rourke's entrance), both in SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.

[117] For the US raising intellectual standards see especially Nash who argues that the intellectual content of female higher education in the early republic was close to that of male higher education. Nash, *Women's Education*. For the growing competition and standards in France see Rogers and especially her finding regarding nuns' improving intellectual training after 1830. Rogers' study is particularly helpful because she analyzes the evolution of the Religious of the Sacred Heart over the 19th century. Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, chaps. 2, 5.

[118] Plan d'études, 1820 and 1833, Manuscript, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA and AGSSC ; Plan d'études in *Règlement des Pensionnats*, 1852, 76-128 ; Notes on the Plan of Studies. 1820, 1833, 1852, n.d., Series I C, 4 G, Box 1, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.

[119] *Constitutions et règles des Sœurs de la Providence*, 44. Cullity, "Educational Work of the Sisters of Providence," 118.

Joseph Bailly's granddaughter (St Mary's, 1860)—who graduated from French convent schools evidence that nuns could and did teach the entire course of study.[120]

But as they strove to implement the Plan of studies, the early US Religious of the Sacred Heart had to overcome challenges. The dearth and high cost of the textbooks in frontier Missouri and the distance from France required extra work and time to gather educational material—textbooks, catechisms, globes, etc. Like pianos and plans of studies, French religious and family relations shipped this material to the United States, and Philippine Duchesne carefully instructed them how to label the boxes to benefit from the US customs exemption on school material. Unsurprisingly, communicating with the students and their parents was another difficulty. Arriving in "St. Louis *des Illinois*"[121] in the Missouri Territory, the Religious of the Sacred Heart had expected to have mostly French-speaking students but realized that "English had become indispensable"[122] in Upper Louisiana—the migration of Anglo-Americans to St Louis after 1815 tripled the free population in just six years (from 1,500 to 4,500).[123] While the Sisters of Providence benefitted early on from the presence of bilingual novice (Sr Mary Cecilia Bailly), the Religious of the Sacred Heart's adaptation to an increasingly anglophone world was slower. They were not without resources, however. In the early 1820s, one of their boarders in Florissant, Missouri quickly learned French and translated imported textbooks into English.[124] Additionally, to prevent that students would flee to the rival academies that grew more numerous in the 1830s St Louis area, Catherine Thiéfry hired Anglophone masters for the higher classes

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[120] "Convent of the Sacred Heart," *Missouri Republican*, July ?, 1850 ; "Valedictory at the Academy of the Sacred Heart," *Detroit Free Press*, July 7, 1864; "Academy of St. Mary's of the Woods," *Wabash Courier*, August 6, 1853; Mary Ann Rourke Cartan, Recollections of Venerated Mother Duchesne and the Sacred Heart Convent of St. Louis, 1910, Series I D, 1 b, Box 1, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA. Rourke claimed that two other girls graduated on the same day of 1837. For 1859-1860, the St Mary's Catalogue of Pupils reads, "1860 OUR FIRST GRADUATE Rose F. Howe." Catalogue of the pupils who have been in our Institute, 1841-1870, SMWA.
[121] PD to MSB, June 22, 1818, in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 361.
[122] PD to Louis Barat, August 29, 1818, in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 384.
[123] Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 50.
[124] PD to Thérèse Maillucheau, April 11, 1821, in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 558.

and arranged for local priests to teach sisters advanced subjects, such as physics. Just like in France, competition and religious rules guaranteed intellectual quality.[125]

In sum, thanks to their French curricular and pedagogical model, the material support from the French houses, and their unique French cachet, French nuns were well equipped to meet the high US standards of female academy education, as reflected in their school numbers. Despite Catherine Thiéfry's alarmist letters on the allegedly superior education imparted by the Visitation nuns of Kaskaskia, the number of Sacred Heart City House boarders increased from 25 boarders in 1835 to 60 or 70 in 1837, a number on par with the Visitation that put City House at full capacity.[126] Most French convent schools similarly thrived within a decade or so of their opening. The average number of students—130 to 150—who attended the Detroit Sacred Heart in the 1860s was comparable to its two rivals—Miss Hunt's Academy in the years 1852-1858 and the Detroit Female seminary after 1859.[127] At St. Mary's, the number of students also grew fast, reaching 70 to 80 boarders after 1853, which was considerable for an institution open to boarders only and the maximum number of boarders the Sisters could decently accommodate.

Even more telling of early St Mary's reputation was the boarders' background. While four private female academies were in operation in Indiana by St Mary's opening (1841), and over fifteen by 1854, St Mary's attracted girls from all over Indiana and eastern Illinois and even a couple from Louisiana, New York, or Pennsylvania every year. Besides local elites—doctors,

[125] Catherine Thiéfry to Eugénie Audé, December 15, 1834 and June 13, 1836, Box Catherine Thiéfry, C-VII-2 I, AGSSC.

[126] Henriette de Kersaint's estimate of the number of boarders was higher than Catherine Thiéfry's. Henriette de Kersaint, Souvenirs sur la maison de St Louis, Series C-IV St Louis, Box 1, AGSSC ; Catherine Thiéfry to Eugénie Audé, January 6, 1835 and September 15, 1837; Catherine Thiéfry to MSB, October 8, 1836, all Thiéfry's letters are in Box Catherine Thiéfry, C-VII-2 I, AGSSC. For the number of students at the Sacred Heart and Visitation convents: *Catholic Almanac*, 1838, 111, 113-115.

[127] Miss Hunt's Academy claimed to have 130 students for the scholastic year 1852-1853 "Detroit Ladies' Academy," in James Dale Johnston, *Johnston's Detroit Directory and Business for 1853-1854* (Detroit: John Pomroy), 306. "Detroit Female Seminary," *Detroit Free Press*, September 5, 1861. For the Sacred Heart Academy: House Journal, September 9, 1864; Le Détroit, *Lettres Annuelles*, 1863-66.

printers, etc.—prominent politicians sent their daughters to St Mary's. Ruth and Almeria Drake were the daughters of the Indiana State Treasurer; Harriet Tipton the daughter of the late US Senator John Tipton.[128] Each Summer, Catholic and Protestant men lauded the quality of the education imparted at St Mary's in their Commencement speech and subsequent local newspapers articles.[129] And even anti-Catholic critics grudgingly conceded that "[t]he Institution of St Mary's is by its position, its domestic and literary principles, unsurpassed by any in our state. It possesses advantages I have met with nowhere else."[130]

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With their magnificent schools and convents (fig. 5 and 6), the French Sisters also helped reshape the West built environment into what they deemed a more civilized and beautiful landscape. Like many antebellum white Americans, French nuns were obsessed with and proud of the transformation of the alleged wilderness into a refined landscape.[131] Arriving in frontier Missouri and "woodland" Indiana, the underdeveloped urban and rural landscape as well as poor living conditions, as they understood them, were a shock to French-born nuns, who described their material conditions and surroundings at length in their letters to France. Probably expecting that US cities were comparable to French ones, Philippine Duchesne declared to the Superior

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[128] Catalogue of the Pupils who have been in our Institute, 1841-1870, SMWA; Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*, 519-520, 698-699.

[129] For the number of boarders and their geographic origins boarders: MTG, Journal, SMWA; Catalogue of Pupils who have been in our Institute, 1841-1870, SMWA. Mother Theodore mentions in her Journal that they reached the maximum capacity of boarders. Information on other Indiana female seminaries are in Richard G. Boone, *A History of Education in Indiana* (New York: D. Appleton and Co: 1892), 83-86. Surprisingly, Boone ignored all the Sisters of Providence's academies. Information on the students' family background are in Brown, *History of the Sisters of Providence*, 519-520, 698-699. For evidence that Protestants too gave Commencement speeches: SFX to Mme Le Fer, August 7, 1846 in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 336; MTG, Journal, ca. July 1855, SMWA.

[130] A Visitor, *Tippecanoe Journal*, September 1846 (I am looking for the original reference. A long abstract of this article is quoted by Mother Theodore in MTG to Bishop Bouvier, November 26, 1846, SMWA)

[131] I am not developing this point because I would already have in an earlier chapter on church buildings. To give you a sense, 19th-century city and state directories have long lists of "improvements" and most included engravings of the most refined buildings (churches, company headquarters, mansions, etc.)

General shortly after arriving in St Louis in 1818 that a "large establishment was not an option" in a place where houses looked like France's "vineyard lodges."[132] Arriving 22 years later in Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, a place located four miles across the Wabash River from the closest city of Terre Haute, Mother Theodore, who was from rural Brittany, wrote to a friend, "[W]e are definitely located in a forest, and here in the midst of the woods we spent our first winter in America in a cabin."[133] To be sure, these two women had made a vow of poverty, but the glory of God and the Catholic cause as well as their institutions' success required "beautiful" buildings and landscapes.

The French sisterhoods consciously built and marketed elegant academies. St Mary's Academy and convent buildings and their surroundings preoccupied Mother Theodore even more than pianos. On July 2nd of 1841, the Sisters of Providence opened their academy in a brand new "large brick house"[134]—the only brick building on their property. The revenues of St Mary's allowed for the addition of two aisles and, in October 1847—the painting and cement barely dry—the Sisters informed the readers of the *Indiana State Sentinel* that "the additions to their [the Sisters of Providence's] Academy are now completed, and it is at present capable of accommodating a large number of pupils."[135] To entice new students and convince their parents that St Mary's "retired and beautiful situation gives to the juvenile mind that bend so necessary in the pursuit of knowledge, and its peculiarly healthy locality gives zest and vigor to the youthful frame […]," the Sisters added a sketch of the new building and its retired surrounding

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[132] PD to MSB, August 31, 1818, in *PDOC*, 392. My translation. The original quote is "Il ne faut pas se faire l'idée d'un grand établissement ici […]. Les maisons ressemblent aux pavillons de nos vignes ou aux maisons de nos faubourgs." On Duchesne's French background: Callan, *Philippine Duchesne: Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart, 1769-1852*, Part I.
[133] MTG to Abbé Lottin, May 25, 1841, SMWA.
[134] MTG to Abbé Lottin, May 25, 1841, SMWA.
[135] "St Mary's of the Woods," *Indiana State Sentinel*, October 16, 1847. Just five days before this announcement was printed, Mother Theodore recorded in her Journal that the last coats of painting and cement were just completed.

on their 1848 prospectus.[136] Similarly, after the completion of a new convent in 1854, Sister Anastasie Brown drew a sketch that Mother Theodore hurried to have printed on a new prospectus (fig. 5) to display St Mary's healthy and beautiful grounds, now including the playground with linden trees, designed by a New York landscape gardener. The Superior General must have been proud to hear an Indianapolis prominent citizen describe her institution as "the beautiful mansion of St. Mary's" in his 1852 Commencement speech.[137]

Fig. 5. St Mary's of the Woods, ca. 1854

[136] "St Mary's of the Woods," *Indiana State Sentinel*, October 16, 1847 (for the quote). This prospectus has not survived, but we know Mother Theodore had the engraving added because she mentioned it in her Journal. MTG, Journal, October 19, 1848, SMWA.

[137] George P. Buell, *An Address Delivered to the Young Ladies of St. Mary's Academy, at an Annual Examination, Held August 5, 1852* (Terre-Haute: David Danaldson, 1852)

The academy is the smaller building on the left with the playground in front. The brand-new convent is the larger building on the right. The smaller buildings in front of the convent are where the laundry sisters worked. The small house between the academy and the convent is the priest's house. By adding this engraving to their prospectus, the Sisters of Providence hoped to demonstrate how beautiful and healthy their property was.

Credit: Sisters of Providence Archives, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods IN

Though few US Sacred Heart academies could boast a truly "retired" location, being mostly located in cities to carry on the French tradition, they nonetheless emphasized and took pride in their beautiful and healthy buildings.[138] In the 1833 prospectus, the Ladies of the Sacred

Heart marketed St. Louis Academy as "[s]ituated on an elevation which commands a delightful prospect of the Mississippi river […]—the buildings are invariably ventilated with the purest air that can be breathed in the healthiest part of the State. A spacious garden and yard afford the pupils free scope for bodily exercise."[139] To be sure, the Ladies of the Sacred Heart hoped to reassure parents in an era when cholera and yellow fever epidemics were still major threats. But the case of the new Detroit Sacred Heart Academy, completed in 1862, demonstrates that the nuns also prided themselves in erecting modern and prominent buildings. An anonymous 1861 newspaper article boasted that the building was designed by "James W. Wall, architect of New York city," lighted with gas and supplied with hot water and heating in all the rooms thanks to a "hot furnace of new invention."[140] To further impress Detroiters, starting in 1863 the prospectus included an engraving of the Academy (fig. 6).[141] Though the author of the 1861 article likely hoped to convince parents to enroll their daughters at the Sacred Heart Academy, few Detroiters would have disagreed that it was "one of the finest buildings in the city" as well as "one of the best edifices of the kind in the West."[142]

Fig. 6. Detroit Sacred Heart Convent and Academy, ca. 1862

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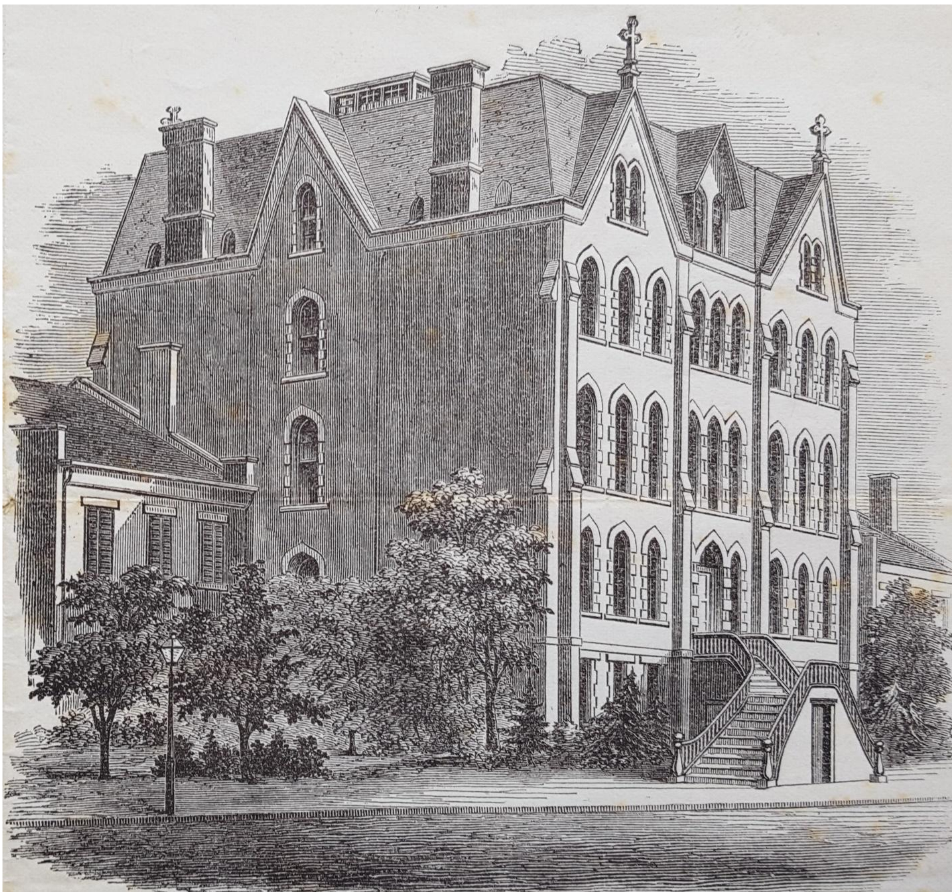
[138] Except for the first Missouri Sacred Heart academies, located in small towns—St Charles (1818-1819) and Florissant (1819-1840)—and the first two Louisiana academies located in rural areas (Grand Coteau and St Michel), the Sacred Heart Academies opened in cities or on the outskirts of cities.
[139] "Young Ladies' Academy at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, St. Louis, Mo.," in *Catholic Almanac for 1833*, 103.
[140] Both quotes are from "New Seminary for the Ladies of the Sacred Heart," *Detroit Free Press*, June 1, 1861
[141] "Academy of the Sacred Heart," *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1863—4* (Detroit, 1863), Detroit Advertisement 17.
[142] "New Seminary for the Ladies of the Scared Heart," *Detroit Free Press*, June 1, 1861.



Credit: General Archives of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Rome

As one historian of US Catholicism suggests, nuns took extra pain to design and market beautiful academies with costly sketches to entice Protestants and demonstrate the superiority of a convent education.[143] But there was more than Protestant-Catholic competition to this story. French nuns genuinely believed that they arrived from a fine and civilized country to a backward

[143] Kara French, "'You Can be a Catholic if you want'," 5-12.

wilderness and that it was their mission to civilize it by importing Catholicism and fine manners as well as erecting beautiful surroundings.

"The daughters of Protestants throng the halls" of French convent schools[144]

From its teaching to its building, French-style education helped transcend the religious differences between Catholics and Protestants. In the West, the Religious of the Sacred Heart and the Sisters of Providence contributed to a shared culture of respectability that distinguished white elites and those aspiring to assert their middle-class status from the rest of the population. But French nuns' early and inescapable role in the refinement of the West prompted strong anti-Protestant reactions from Protestants who viewed Catholics as a threat to US Protestant identity.

From the beginning, the Sisters opened their academies to non-Catholic students. Philippine Duchesne, who had imagined herself as the new Marie of the Incarnation converting "heathens" of North America, was sorely disappointed when Bishop Dubourg instructed her to open Sacred Heart academies to Protestant girls, forbade them to proselytize, and made sure their prospectus offered guarantees to non-Catholic parents in this regard.[145] Therefore, the Religious of the Sacred Heart guaranteed in their prospectuses that no "undue influence" would be "exercised over [the young Ladies'] religious principles,"[146] even if the sisters' private correspondence evidences that, like Philippine Duchesne, many regarded it as a painful sacrifice.[147]

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[145] Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 43-44 ; PD to MSB, August 31, 1818 in PDOC, vol. 1, 394 and PD to Louis Barat, November 21, 1818 in *Ibid*, 415.
[146] "Young Ladies' Academy, Conducted by the Ladies of the Institute of the Sacred Heart, St Louis, Mo," in *Catholic Almanac for 1844*, 104.
[147] See for instance SFX to Mme Le Fer, December 1842, in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 265-266.

This strategy was rewarding as approximately half of the students were Protestant in the early nineteenth century. According to Mother Duchesne, over half the boarders at Florissant—the first lasting Sacred Heart boarding school—were Protestants in 1826.[148] At nearby City House, both the absolute number and ratio of Protestant students increased between the 1827 opening and the 1840s, reflecting the well-established reputation of the Academy. While most City House students during its first years of operation were "creoles"[149] (French-descended)—Chouteau, Pratte, Papin, Paul, Brazeau, and Berthold girls, etc.—, Anglophones became a majority as early as 1833-1834. By 1837, almost half of the students were Protestant and there might have been up to two thirds in 1846.[150] In the same vein, Detroit Sacred Heart Academy had Protestant students from the beginning (1851) and, in the 1860s, at least 53% of the 272 entering boarders were Protestants. As for the day students, in 1863, 1864, and 1865—years with almost exhaustive data—half were Protestants.[151] Unlike the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, the Sisters of Providence did not record their students' religion on the Catalogue of Pupils, but their correspondence yields some clue. Sister Saint Francis and Mother Theodore both claimed that over half of the dozen boarders who attended in 1841-1842 were Protestant.[152] While the two Sisters sometimes exaggerated to impress their French relations, this number

[148] PD to Mme Rollin, August 12, 1826, in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 798. The first Sacred Heart boarding school was open in St. Charles, Missouri in 1818 and moved to Florissant, MO the following year. In 1840, the Religious of the Sacred Heart who had then 3 boarding schools in Upper Louisiana decided to focus on only two and ceded Florissant to the Sisters of Loretto.
[149] Henriette de Kersaint, Souvenirs sur la maison de St Louis, Series C IV St Louis, Box 1, AGSSC.
[150] Mother Duchesne claims that 2/3 of the students in St. Louis were Protestant in 1846, but the Register of boarders shows that only about 40% were Protestant. It is possible that Mother Duchesne's estimate was an exaggeration or that the day students attending the Academy were overwhelmingly Protestants. Children's Register City House, 1825-1872, Series IV N 1, Box 1, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA; Catherine Thiéfry to MSB, April 14, 1838, AGSSC ; PD to MSB, June 5, 1846, in *PDOC*, vol. 2, 639.
[151] House Journal Detroit, December 8, 1851 ; Registre du Pensionnat de la Maison de Detroit, 1851-1883 and Registre de l'externat de la maison de Detroit, 1851-1872, Series V C 3, Box 1, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA. Boarders and day students both attended the Academy, but the Religious of the Sacred Heart kept separate registers.
[152] SFX to Mme Le Fer, November 17, 1841 in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 244 ; MTG to Bishop Bouvier, November 21, 1841, SMWA.

seems accurate given that they also named several of the Protestant boarders in their letters.[153] Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Protestants continued to attend St Mary's.[154]

Despite religious differences, French convent education was appealing to upper- and middle-class Midwesterners because it provided them with the cultural capital necessary to assert their social status. As historian Margaret Nash demonstrated, in an age when the middle-class was an ill-defined category, "education became one way the middle-class could distinguish themselves from the very poor and the very wealthy."[155] Sending their daughters to female academies enabled families to become respectable, and therefore middle-class. French nuns imported to the United States the class segregation widespread in French convent schools, adding to it the US racial component.[156] Besides their academies, the two orders ran free schools for girls and orphanages funded by the revenues of the academies. The Religious of the Sacred Heart also opened separate Sunday schools for African-Americans, both in the slave state of Missouri and the free state of Michigan.[157] The Sisters regarded and treated the girls of each institution differently. For instance, viewing the students of the free school and the orphans as dangerous worldly influences for the boarders, the nuns must ensure that their paths did not cross, so the academies, free schools, and orphanages were in separate buildings.[158] The free schools'

[153] MTG to Mother Saint Charles, February 28, 1842, SMWA ; SFX to Mme Le Fer, December 1842, in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 265-266 ; Catalogue of Pupils, 1841-1870, SMWA.
[154] See for instance SFX to Mme Le Fer, July 25, 1845 and August 7, 1846 in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 328-330, 336-338; MTG, Journal, SMWA.
[155] Nash, *Women's Education*, 13. Daniel Cohen makes a similar argument to explain why convent schools were appealing to Protestant girls. Daniel Cohen, "The Respectability of Rebecca Reed: Genteel Womanhood and Sectarian Conflict in Antebellum America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 3: 419-461.
[156] For an overview of the classist and racist logic behind women's higher education in the early republic see Nash, *Women's Education*, 53, 68-76, 99-104. As mentioned above, Nash's conclusions only account for non-Catholic academies. For the classist vision of French female secondary education: Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, 3.
[157] House Journal Detroit, December 10, 1860; Nikola Baumgarten, "Education and Democracy in Frontier St. Louis," 176-177; Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 55-59, 70-71; Croxall, "Holy Waters," 329.
[158] Madeleine-Sophie Barat to the American Religious of the Sacred Heart, September 11, 1835, in *Lettres Circulaires*, 41-49; Academy of the Sacred Heart, *Detroit Free Press*, February 27, 1864.

curriculum was also more rudimentary; the Sisters implemented French teaching methods that emphasized catechism and the 3Rs.[159] This classist and racist view was consensual among US upper- and middle-classes to whom the New Haven (Connecticut) Young Ladies' Institute appealed by bluntly articulating its elitist character, "it is not to every kind of society that we would attach so great a value … A school must be select."[160]

While the French nuns committed to refrain from proselytizing, Catholicism was, of course, ubiquitous in their academies. The prospectuses made clear that to be admitted at St. Mary's, where "the exercises of religious worship are Catholic[,] … [the] members of every other denomination" were required to "assist with propriety at the public duties of religion."[161] In the same vein, the Ladies of the Sacred Heart demanded that their students "pay proper respect to the devotional observances of the Seminary."[162] In both religious orders' convent schools, the "duties of religion" included morning and evening common prayers as well as daily Mass. On special days and months, the Sisters organized additional exercises, such as novenas and processions. Though the Sisters did not compel Protestant girls to take part in all these exercises, accommodated separate religious exercises for them, made sure that Christian instruction emphasized the stories common to all Christian denominations and that Protestant students' examination focused on moral rather than dogma, there is ample evidence that "nothing was more common than to see [Protestants] mingled with the Catholics in special devotions where their presence was not a duty."[163] During the month of Mary (May) and the feast of the

[159] Elisabeth Galitizine, Mémorial de la Visite Provinciale faite à St Louis par M. E. Galitzine, April 16, 1842, in Visitation Book, 1840-1859, City House, Box 2, Series IV N 1, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA.
[160] *Catalogue of the Instructors and Pupils, in the New Haven Young Ladies' Institute, During Its First Year* (New Haven, CT: n.p., 1830), 7-8. Quoted in Nash, *Women's Education*, 102.
[161] The same formulation is repeated in most of the prospectuses published between 1844 and 1858. Female Institute of St Mary's of the Woods, near Terre Haute, Vigo County, Indiana, 1844 and ca. 1854, SMWA; "Sisters of Providence. Female Institute of St. Mary's of the Woods, near Terre Haute, Vigo County, Indiana," in *Terre Haute City Directory* (1858), 35.
[162] "Academy of the Sacred Heart," *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1863—4* (Detroit, 1863), Detroit Advertisement 17.

Immaculate Conception of Mary, for instance, many of them wore medals of the Virgin Mary or bought candles to her altar—the very kind of devotional activities Protestants had rejected since the Reformation. And non-Catholic girls attracted to or simply curious about Catholicism also had the opportunity to gain a better understanding of Catholicism.[164]

That the omnipresence of Catholicism did not prevent Protestant parents from enrolling their daughters at the Sacred Heart Academy is remarkable and suggests that, even in periods of intense nativism and anti-Catholicism like the 1840s and early 1850s, many Protestants opted for a different approach. Driven by a form of Christian ecumenism, Parents probably appreciated the nuns' emphasis on "Christian instruction"[165] and the daily interaction with nuns, whom even Protestant parents regarded as exceptional moral examples.[166] Nuns' emphasis on Christian moral converged with the Christian flavor of the cult of domesticity—the ideal of white middle-class womanhood in 19th-century America. Evangelical Christians who shaped this ideal claimed that white middle-class women had a special role in society as moral reformers. Women, they believed, were morally superior to men and held a special power on them. Therefore, as wives, mothers, and teachers, they could Christianize their families and the whole nation. This moral imperative, in turn, led Evangelical reformers to foster female higher education. As "A Scholar"—a St Mary's Protestant alumnae who answered a Protestant's critiques—rightly noted,

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[163] Elliott, "School Days at the Sacred Heart," 182.
[164] The daily religious exercises are detailed in *Règlement des Pensionnats*, 1852, 7-8 and Elliott, "School Days at the Sacred Heart," 278-281 (for the Sacred Heart); A Scholar, "For the Journal and Free Press," *Tippecanoe Journal*, October 26, 1846 (for St Mary's). For the careful ways of dealing with Protestant students see, for instance, Notes de la Mère Galitzine sur la manière de se comporter en Amérique, ca. 1840, Box 1, II A, SSH Provincial Archives, Canada/USA; MSB to Mes Révérendes Mères et Sœurs bien aimées de notre chère Louisiane, July 31, 1834, in Barat, *Lettres Circulaires*, vol. 2, 34. For evidence of Protestant girls participating in Marian Devotion House Journal Detroit, December 8, 1851 and December 14, 1856. For the curiosity of Protestant students SFX to Mme Le Fer, July 25, 1846 and August 7, 1846 in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 328-329, 336-338 (respectively).
[165] "Prospectus of the Young Ladies' Academy Conducted by the Ladies of the Sacred Heart," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, August 25, 1853. The second quote is from "Academy of the Sacred Heart," *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1863—4* (Detroit, 1863), Detroit Advertisement 17.
[166] Elliott, "School Days at the Sacred Heart," 282.

daily prayers were "customary in every well conducted school."[167] Like in French convent academies, prayers and moral education were meant to shape virtuous women. Spurred by the Second Great Awakening, the Protestant gender ideal and educational project bore striking similarities to the French nuns' design of re-Catholicizing post-revolutionary France through women's education.[168]

As exemplified by the students who converted to Catholicism, the Catholic-Protestant encounter in western convent schools was even characterized by its fluidity and the outright toleration of Catholics. While French convent academies had a significant educational impact, they yielded few converts. At St Mary's, the Sisters of Providence waited for five long years before winning their first convert as several parents had refused their daughters' requests to become Catholics. The low numbers of conversions probably encouraged wary Protestant parents to enroll their daughters in convent schools, but it is worth noting that, even if they were few, the conversions prove that other parents readily tolerated Catholicism. Following scandals of secret baptisms at the Sacred Heart in the early years, subsequent baptisms were no secret ; several parents attended their daughters' baptism and a few, like the Elberts in Detroit, themselves converted as well.[169] In at least one case, religious fluidity was foundational to the family; the first convert of the Sisters of Providence, Mary Anne Duret, was the daughter of a

[167] A SCHOLAR, "For the Journal and Free Press," *Tippecanoe Journal*, October 26, 1846.
[168] For the cult of domesticity and its Christian flavor see Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). For analyses of the religious content of women's education and the role of the Second Great Awakening in its growth see Nash, *Women's Education*, 53-63; Woody, *A History of Women's Education*, 414; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 16. For evidence that the other Detroit female academies also held religious exercises: "Detroit Female Seminary: Semi-Annual Examination of Classes," *Detroit Free Press*, January 31, 1868.
[169] The Religious of the Sacred Heart recorded conversion in their House Journals and Registers of Students. For the public character of baptisms and parents' conversion see for instance House Journal Detroit, May 3, 1852, November 1853, April 4, 1856. For private baptisms: Journal de la Société en Amérique, 1818-1840, June 1, 1822, in *PDOC*, vol. 2, 410 ; Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 99.

mixed marriage—her father was a French-descended Catholic and her mother an Anglo-Protestant.[170]

But the success and toleration of French convent schools provoked a backlash among the Protestants who viewed their Catholicism as a threat to U.S. Protestant identity. In Detroit, Miss Hunt's Academy, likely Protestant, was created with the support of prominent male Detroiters in 1852—just one year after the Sacred Heart Academy—and when it failed, the same men helped the establishment of another Protestant female academy.[171] While this timing might have been a simple coincidence, historian Joseph Mannard demonstrates that, in antebellum America, the fear of nuns and convent schools in the West prompted a reaction among northeastern female evangelical reformers, such as Catharine Beecher. Claiming that "[f]emale education must be provided for—otherwise convents will increase and Catholicism become permanently rooted in our country,"[172] in the 1840s these women inspired the creation of two societies for the development of female education in the West by sending New Englander educators there.[173] It is likely that at least the Detroit Female Seminary was created as part of this evangelical effort as its first principal was a New England minister who stayed in Detroit for only two years; he was then replaced by two other New Englanders. All the teachers came from Massachusetts as well.[174]

[170] On Mary Ann Duret's conversion and her family background see SFX to Mme Le Fer, July 25, 1846, in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 328-330; MTG, Journal, SMWA. On parents opposing their daughters' conversion: PD to Sr Louise Vignaud, April 10, 1821, in *PDOC*, vol. 1, 552-553; Journal de la Société en Amérique, 1818-1840, December 25, 1826, in *Ibid.*, vol 2, 435 ; SFX to Mme Le Fer, December 1842, in La Corbinière, *Une Femme Apôtre*, 265-266

[171] "Detroit Ladies' Academy," *Detroit Daily Free Press*, August 11, 1853 and "Detroit Female Seminary," *Detroit Free Press*, August 20, 1859.

[172] *The American Ladies' Magazine* 7 (December 1834), 564. Quoted in Mannard, "Protestant Mothers and Catholic Sisters": 7-8.

[173] Mannard, "Protestant Mothers and Catholic Sisters."

[174] "Detroit Female Seminary," *Detroit Free Press*, August 20, 1859, September 4, 1859, and September 5, 1861.

The anti-convent backlash unsurprisingly reached a peak during the Know-Nothing campaign of the early 1850s, whose goal was to destroy foreign and Roman Catholic influences in the United States. Know-Nothings like "T. L." felt threatened by the success of the Sisters of Providence and their ability to attract Protestant students. In 1853, he published a violent rebuttal to a laudatory article on St Mary's. While he endeavored to discredit the quality of the convent education through gross exaggerations—nuns could not be "competent teachers" because they "exclude[d] themselves from all connection with the world"—his jealous and intolerant motivations were obvious. He was appalled to see that "the daughters of Protestants throng the halls of St. Mary's, and emerge from them more than half transformed into Catholics!" Unable to consider that nuns could be something else than mischievous, backward idolaters, he lamented his fellow Protestants' "sad blindness" and urged the "citizens of Terre Haute," by which he meant the Protestants, to "establish […] a Seminary of learning on a proper basis."[175] That they so clearly displeased some Protestants was a powerful testimony to French nuns' indisputable and inescapable role in the refinement of the West.

In sum, the success of St Mary's and the US Sacred Heart academies complicate standard stories about rising antebellum anti-Catholicism. While evangelical reformers and some ordinary Protestants raised the alarm of a Catholic West and Catholic convent schools, middle- and upper-class Protestant parents on the ground seemed to care little about the warnings, or at the very least, held them in tension with what they believed Catholics might offer them. Seeing that the French nuns' academies rivaled the refined and virtuous education provided in other academies of their city or state, these parents valued above all the opportunity to assert their social status

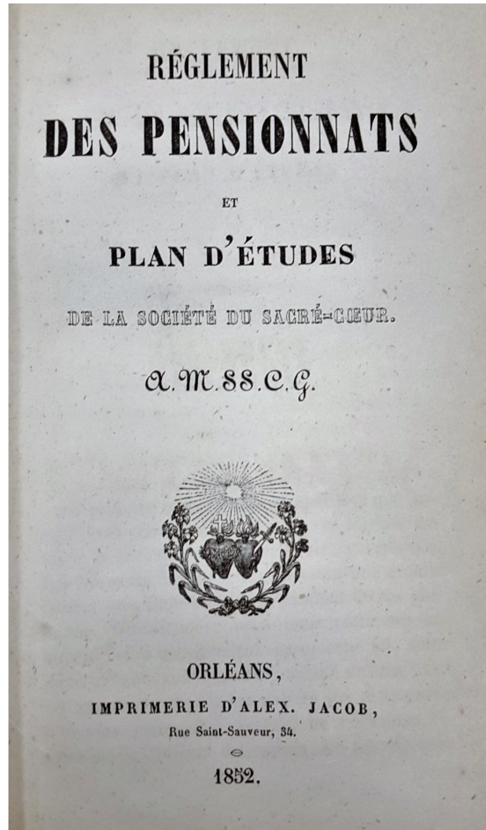
[175] All the paragraph's quotes are from T. L., "Mr. Editor," *Wabash Courier*, October [add day], 1853. His letter to the editors of the Wabash Courier is a direct answer to B. M. T., "Academy of St. Mary's of the Woods," *Wabash Courier*, August 6, 1853.

through their daughters' French-style education. As the nuns knew, in the face of competition, their French prestige was their trump card, and they were more than willing to play it, for God, for the Church, and for the new nation.

Conclusion

The example of French female education illustrates French Catholic cultural vibrancy well into the antebellum era. Before the arrival of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in 1818 Missouri Territory, such influences were limited to French-descended communities and families and primarily meant to maintain their culture and economic position. After 1818, French-style education began to cater to a more diverse religious and ethnic public. This vitality resulted in part from the involvement of French-born missionaries—Father Richard, the Religious of the Sacred Heart, and the Sisters of Providence—in education. But French-born clergy were not operating alone. In places like Detroit, they cooperated and benefitted from the support of French-descended women, such as Elisabeth Williams and Monique Labadie-Beaubien. Ultimately, the story of French cultural influences complicates the narrative of early US Catholics as victims of anti-Catholicism. To be sure, anti-Catholic sentiments and violence existed. But Catholicism was also the anchor of the French-descended, and Protestant parents valued the nuns' French cachet and French pedagogy over their Catholic faith.

Fig. 2. The 1852 Plan of Education of the Society of the Sacred Heart



RÉGLEMENT

DES PENSIONNATS

ET

PLAN D'ÉTUDES

DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DU SACRÉ-CŒUR.

A.M.SS.C.G.

ORLÉANS,

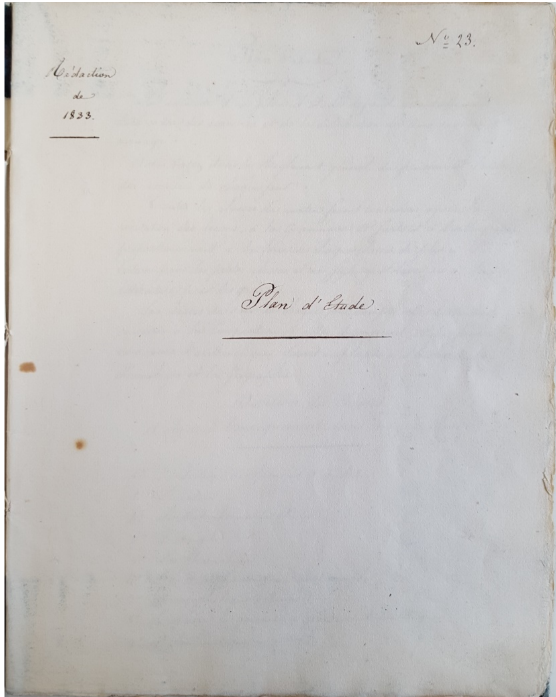
IMPRIMERIE D'ALEX. JACOB,

Rue Saint-Sauveur, 34.

1852.

Credit: Society of the Sacred Heart Provincial Archives, United States-Canada Province, St. Louis, MO.

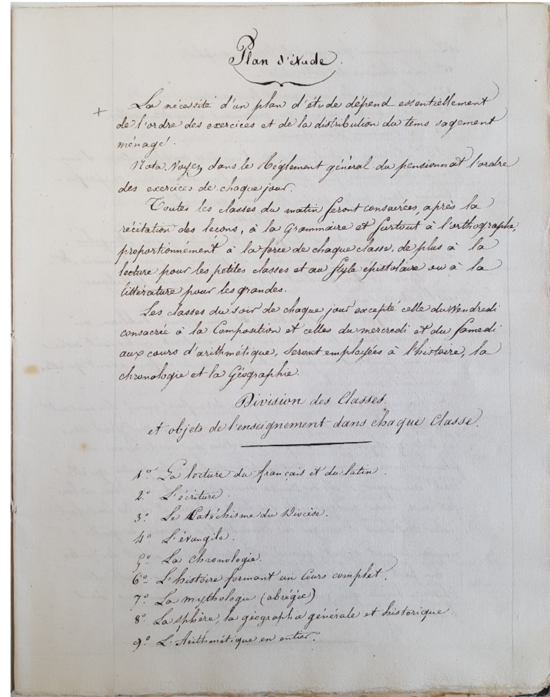
Fig. 1: Copy #23 of the 1833 Sacred Heart Plan of study



N° 23.

Rédaction
de
1833.

Plan d'Étude



Plan d'étude.

La nécessité d'un plan d'étude dépend essentiellement de l'ordre des exercices et de la distribution du tems sagement ménagé.

Nota. Voyez dans le Règlement général du pensionnat l'ordre des exercices de chaque jour.

Toutes les classes du matin seront consacrées, après la récitation des leçons, à la Grammaire et surtout à l'orthographe, proportionnément à la force de chaque classe, de plus à la lecture pour les petites classes et au style épistolaire ou à la littérature pour les grandes.

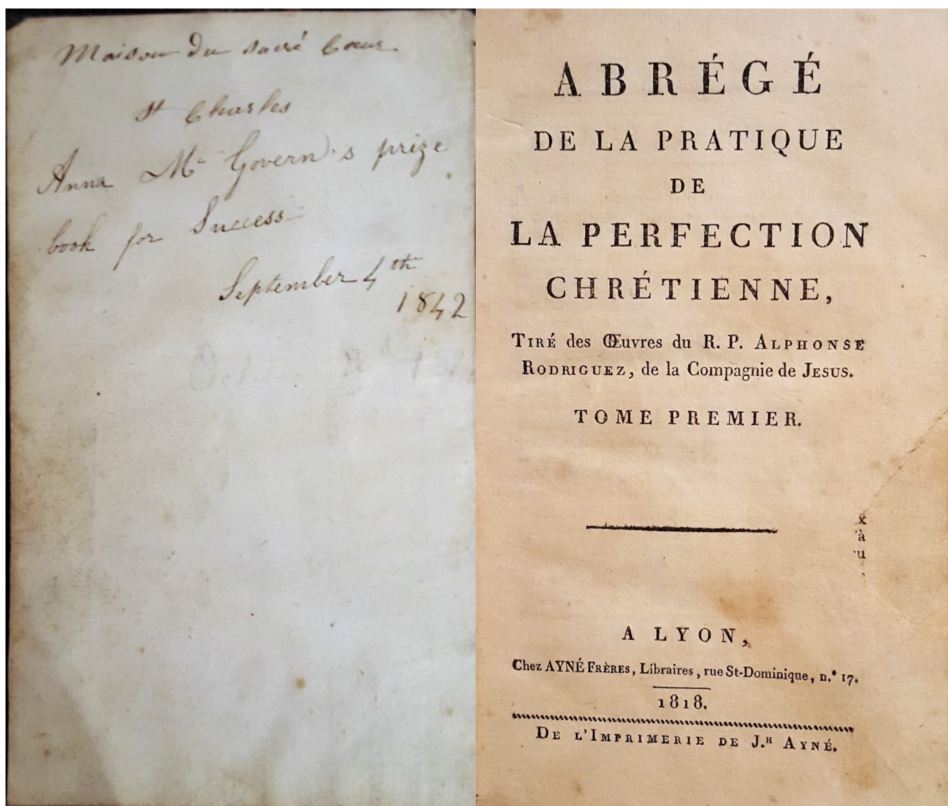
Les classes du soir de chaque jour excepté celle du Vendredi consacrée à la Composition et celles du mercredi et du samedi aux cours d'arithmétique, seront employées à l'histoire, la chronologie et la Géographie.

Division des Classes.
et objets de l'enseignement dans chaque Classe.

1°. La lecture du français et du latin.
2° L'écriture.
3° Le Catéchisme du Diocèse.
4° L'évangile.
5° La chronologie.
6° L'histoire formant un cours complet.
7° La mythologie (abrégée)
8° La sphère, la géographie générale et historique
9° L'Arithmétique en entier.

Numbered 23, this manuscript copy of the 1833 Sacred Heart Plan d'Études *is one of several that have survived. In its first decades of existence, the Religious of the Sacred Heart painstakingly copied the documents that helped ensure a high degree of uniformity throughout their network (Plan of study, Rules of the boarding schools, Community's rules, etc.). Manuscript such as the above were shipped across the Atlantic for the US nuns' use.*

Credit: General Archives of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Rome



Maison du sacré Coeur
St Charles
Anna Mc Govern's prize
book for Success
September 4th
1842

ABRÉGÉ
DE LA PRATIQUE
DE
LA PERFECTION
CHRÉTIENNE,

TIRÉ des Œuvres du R. P. ALPHONSE RODRIGUEZ, de la Compagnie de JESUS.

TOME PREMIER.

A LYON,
Chez AYNÉ FRÈRES, Libraires, rue St-Dominique, n.° 17.
1818.
DE L'IMPRIMERIE DE J.H AYNÉ.

Fig. 3.

Published in France in 1818, this religious book was awarded to Anna McGovern (a student at the Sacred Heart Academy of St. Charles, MO) as a prize for success in 1842. The Sisters' relations regularly sent them religious and educational books and material, which contributed to the ubiquitous French character of the Religious of the Sacred Heart's convent schools.

Credit: St Charles Archives of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, St Charles, MO