

The Material Culture of the Loretto School for Girls in Hamilton, Ontario, 1865-1971

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The material culture at Mount St. Mary (the site location of the Loretto School for Girls and Loretto Academy) in Hamilton, Ontario from 1865-1971 espoused the values of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM, popularly known as the Loretto Sisters) in the education of young girls and women. This paper examines how the Loretto Sisters operated the school in relation to material culture, the analysis of archaeological and architectural documented sources of the buildings, site, location, and interior and exterior structures of the Loretto Hamilton house and school.¹ The result of this study is to reveal what the Sisters' values were in the context of the Hamilton house and school, and within the broader context of the secular world and sacred society dominated by male clergy.

The IBVM was instituted by Mary Ward (1585-1645) in seventeenth-century England. Ward utilized her own extensive education in French, Italian, Latin, Greek, and music as the basis for a specific Catholic female education for upper-class English Catholics. The Loretto Sisters were initially a small group of voluntary exiles from Post-Reformation England who dedicated their lives to work in education in St. Omers, Belgium, and throughout the Continent. It was Ward's tenet that a Christian education, instilled in future mothers of Catholics, could save Catholics from paganism and immorality. In addition to their pedagogy and practice, the IBVM declared themselves Catholic educators via architectural religious symbolism, and spoke as Catholics in a predominantly Protestant society.

There are a number of factors that account for Hamilton being chosen as the location for an addition to the growing number of Loretto schools in the province. The Irish teaching order of Sisters was desperately

¹ The IBVM arrived in Toronto on 16 September 1847 at the request of Bishop Michael Power to educate the burgeoning numbers of illiterate Irish Catholic immigrants. For a recent history of the IBVM and their educational accomplishments in Ontario see Marion Norman, IBVM, "Making a Path By Walking: Loretto Pioneers Facing the Challenges of Catholic Education on the North American Frontier," CCHA *Historical Studies* 65 (1999): 92-106.

needed in a city with a burgeoning illiterate and impoverished Irish Catholic population. Around 1830 several major public works had been in need of labourers to complete construction on the Welland Canal (1824-1833), the Burlington Bay Canal (1826-1830), and the Desjardins Canal in Dundas (1826-1837). The Irishmen who worked on the canal projects and their families, numbered about 133 in the town's population of 1,075 inhabitants.² The 1840s witnessed the doubling of the Irish Catholic population for a number of reasons: there was a decrease in transiency among Irish emigrants because of a general economic depression; the exodus of Reform sympathizers and American patriots to the United States following the unsuccessful rebellion of 1837-38 included very few Irish Catholics; the Irish had put down roots in the southeast section of Hamilton, an area that would come to be known as "Corktown." In terms of ethnic settlement in Hamilton, ethnicity played no role in the determination of block settlement configurations before Confederation. As several researchers have noted, Hamilton showed no evidence of class or ethnic residential segregation: the Scots lived alongside the Irish, and the rich beside the poor.³

In 1847, Bishop Michael Power of Toronto had complained of "the members of his flock, in many sections, [who] were inadequately fulfilling their duties as true children of the Church,"⁴ and "yearned with affectionate solicitude to procure religious instruction for the little ones of the flock."⁵ In 1865, Hamilton's Irish Catholic community accounted for approximately 25 per cent of the city's total population.⁶ Through population growth, employment opportunity soared in Hamilton between 1851 and 1871. In these 20 years, however, the Irish Catholic population in the work force had decreased from 25 per cent to 12 per cent and if they were employed, they continued at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy in unskilled labour in canal and construction work. In Hamilton, "the Irish Catholics faced discrimination, which made it extremely difficult for them to escape poverty."⁷ There also occurred a

² *St. Mary's Roman Catholic Scrapbook*, I: 1892. Hamilton Public Library Special Collections (HPLSC).

³ Ian Davey and Michael Doucet, "The Social Geography of a Commercial City, ca. 1853," in Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: 1975), 336.

⁴ Margaret Costello, *Life and Letters of Mother Teresa Dease* (Toronto: 1916), 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶ Michael Katz, Michael Doucet, and Mark Stern, *Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge: 1982), 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

gender imbalance among the Irish Catholics, according to Michael Katz, whereby the number of married immigrant Irish Catholic women decreased from 71 per cent in 1851 to 52 per cent in 1871. Due to an economic depression from 1857 onwards, Irish Catholic males were forced to emigrate to the United States in search of employment. The resulting sex ratio imbalance and delayed marriages⁸ for women had numerous dire implications for these destitute women: early “widowhood,” being single, or illegitimate births.⁹ In other words, Irish Catholic women were being forced to live a life economically independent of their husbands. The only career options available to them in the 1850s were as domestic servants,¹⁰ seamstresses, or prostitutes. The only new and respectable opportunity for female employment was teaching, and as Alison Prentice and Susan Houston have researched, by 1869, there were already 566 Roman Catholic lay teachers instructing in both common and separate schools.¹¹ As Bishop Power had noted, the discrimination and bigotry against the Irish Catholic population had deprived them of jobs, and most importantly, a decent education.¹²

On the other hand, by the 1850s there were well-established Irish Catholic families who had relied on the convent and seminary schools in Europe (as had Protestants) to educate their children. This increase in wealth could be attributed to Catholic entrepreneurs, tavern and boarding house keepers such as John Bradley and builders, who supported the schools and churches through private donations. It was here, too, that a pool of labourers, particularly Irish Catholic labourers, could be found.¹³

Prentice and Houston argue that separate school enrolments skyrocketed and then stabilized by the mid-1860s.¹⁴ In Hamilton, this sudden surge in enrolment necessitated the erection of four separate schools in the downtown area: St Mary’s (1856) on Park Street North, St. Patrick’s (1856) at Hunter and Ferguson Streets, St. Vincent’s¹⁵ (1860) on Pearl Street, and St. Lawrence (1864) on Ferrie Street in the north

⁸ Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, 279.

⁹ Michael Katz, *Social Organization*, 341.

¹⁰ Sixty per cent of domestic servants in Hamilton had been born in Ireland, and 47 per cent were Catholics. Ninety per cent were unmarried females. See Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, 27-8.

¹¹ Alison Prentice and Susan Houston, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: 1988), 289.

¹² Kathleen McGovern, *Something More Than Ordinary* (Richmond Hill, Ontario: 1989), 78.

¹³ *Western Mercury*, 10 July 1834: 2. HPLSC.

¹⁴ Alison Prentice and Susan Houston, *Schooling and Scholars*, 290-2.

¹⁵ St. Vincent’s later became the Cathedral Commercial School for Girls.

end. The late 1850s and 1860s witnessed rapid development taking place in the city's north end. The harbour was becoming a major transportation centre and the new railway tied in with the developing road system to supply the rural areas south, west, and north of the city. Additional industries grew relating to the railway and harbour, and the north end swelled with the recent Irish immigrants who worked on the major transportation systems.

Any discussion of why Hamilton was chosen as a site for the Loretto convent and school must involve Bishop Farrell of Hamilton who, in a letter written to Mother Teresa Dease in 1865, reveals his urgency in having the Loretto Sisters establish a school:

I have no hesitation in consenting to have your house in this diocese dependent on the Mother House in Toronto, so that the Superior of the latter house may be enabled to remove or change subjects, whenever she may deem it advisable, and that she may receive from the revenues of each establishment all due support for the said Mother House. It is moreover my intention, that the house to be established in Hamilton shall be exempted from attending parochial offices, and shall be provided with Daily Mass, weekly Confession, and the other opportunities of spiritual advancement usual in your Communities, and in conformity with the Spirit of the Church.¹⁶

The first four teaching Sisters at Loretto Hamilton took up temporary quarters in a house on Catherine Street in June 1865 until the commencement of classes on September 16th the same year.

The Loretto buildings underwent three periods of architectural change: 1865-1892; 1892-1933; and 1934-1971. These architectural renovations and additions were directly linked to changes in how the students were being taught, what they were being taught, and by whom they were being taught. Both the internal and external structure at Mount St. Mary were imbued with architecture too symbolically Christian to be a mere coincidence. William Westfall notes that nineteenth-century Christian architecture in Ontario was a "religious lexicon, the best architecture was the one that expresse[d] the finest religion most clearly and truthfully."¹⁷

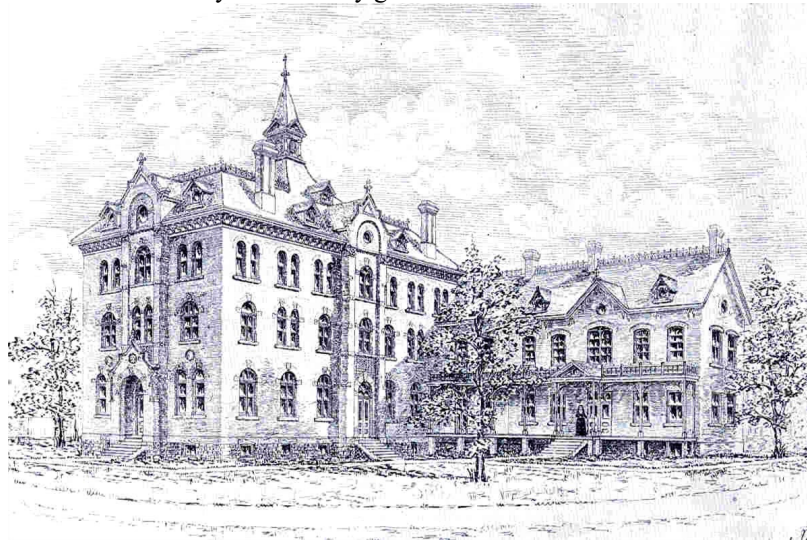
Hamilton's Loretto school and convent had been transformed from an already existent "four-square section" light-coloured brick building, a former residence of the officers of the 16th Canadian regimen located

¹⁶ Margaret Costello, *Life and Letters*, 146.

¹⁷ William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Kingston & Montreal: 1988), 136.

on King Street between Pearl and Ray.¹⁸ The land had been sold to the Roman Catholic Church in 1865, which in turn sold it to the Sisters of Loretto for \$8,000 in 1866.¹⁹

The original Loretto building was characteristic of the Gothic Revival (1830-1900), an architectural style that utilized an eclectic mix of classical Georgian and Neoclassical styles, distinguished by the “finishing touches” of the Gothic style. The simple lancet or pointed window, located in the centre gable above the main door, is the most common feature of the Gothic style. Other Gothic indicators include the vergeboard or bargeboard, a roof trim decorated with curvilinear patterns,²⁰ bay windows, a veranda and a steep roof supporting tall decorative chimneys. The many gabled windows were not



Loretto Convent, Mount St. Mary, Hamilton, 1907
Source: *Niagara Rainbow*, V. 14, No. 1, January 1907
(Courtesy Loretto Archives, IBVM)

merely designed for ornamental purposes but also to allow the maximum amount of sunlight to filter through in an age without electricity and a desire for better air because of chronic respiratory illnesses. It was the

¹⁸ For more information on the commission, erection and maintenance of Loretto buildings see Margaret Costello, *Life and Letters of Mother Teresa Dease* and Kathleen McGovern, *Something More Than Ordinary*.

¹⁹ Margaret Costello, *Life and Letters*, 145.

²⁰ John Blumenson, *Ontario Architecture: A Guide to Styles and Building Terms, 1784-present* (London: 1990), 37.

duty of the Infirmarian, for example, to keep “clean and well-ventilated yet free from draught” rooms in the infirmary,²¹ and refectory.²² The intricate planning and renovations to the then 28-year-old Gothic brick building included a chapel, school rooms, infirmary, and sleeping quarters. As Roberta Gilchrist notes, material culture can be configured to have multiple meanings. In her work on later medieval nunneries, Gilchrist found that archaeology was often imbued with constructed images of female spirituality obtained by space boundaries.²³

The building was situated on elevated wooded ground. Convents and abbeys were often located on a hill in order to relate the building as an expression of power,²⁴ “symbolic of higher aspiration” and to “rise above the commerce of everyday life.”²⁵ On a more practical level, higher elevation ensured good health,²⁶ and solved the problem of drainage.²⁷ Urban historian, John C. Weaver, writes of residential segregation in North American towns, where the quality of a home or institution depended upon drainage. Several streams, for example, crossed the neighbourhood of Corktown, one of the least desirable Hamilton areas that had been developed in the 1830s and 1840s to house the concentration of immigrant Irish Catholics. Corktown was considerably lower than the sand ridge running from Burlington Heights to the escarpment, a rise where the better homes (and Mount St. Mary) were located.²⁸

Forty students were studying English, Mathematics, French, German, Art, Music, Home Economics, and Religious Studies in the two-storey red brick walled, wisteria-vined structure with a chapel on the upper floor and the classrooms and the dining room on the ground level in 1865. Roberta Gilchrist argues that medieval nunneries tended to have two-storey refectories that were representative of the *coenaculum*, the upper storey of the home of Mary, where women participated in the early church at Jerusalem.²⁹ Mary is not only the IBVM’s namesake, but also

²¹ *1861 Constitutions*, Article 6, “Of the Infirmarian.”

²² *Ibid.*, Article 9, “Of the Refectorian.”

²³ Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: 1994), 97.

²⁴ Louis Hellman, *Architecture for Beginners* (London: 1986), 17.

²⁵ Vicki Bennett, *Sacred Space and Structural Style: The Embodiment of Socio-Religious Ideology* (Ottawa: 1997), 244.

²⁶ Roberta Gilchrist, *Material Culture*, 32.

²⁷ Edwin Smith and Olive Cook, *English Abbeys and Priors* (London: 1960), 28.

²⁸ John C. Weaver, *Hamilton: An Illustrated History* (Hamilton, Ontario: 1982), 32.

²⁹ Roberta Gilchrist, *Material Culture*, 190-1.

Mount St. Mary's. Gilchrist documents evidence that Mary was a symbol of femininity, virtue and gender identity,³⁰ and so it is not surprising that many orders had statues of Mary enshrined on their front lawns. Mount St. Mary was a feminine enclave, inhabited solely by women, whether choir nuns, lay Sisters or students, presided over by the Mother Superior.

The Mount St. Mary buildings were maintained by possessions, tuition, diocesan revenues, donations, patronages, and oblations. In 1865, there was a summerhouse with an old, unused well in back of it, and an old carriage-house distant from the convent and at right angles to it to the north. On the front lawn stood the statuary Holy Family in front of the stately French windows of the music room. The architecture of Loretto Academy reveals many differing images of female and maternal spirituality. The statues of the Holy Family, with Mary holding the infant Jesus (a Gothic image), on the front lawn of Mount St. Mary reassured parents that not only was Loretto a religious institution but one that espoused the sanctity of the family. Alison Prentice refers to nineteenth-century school promoters as "fathers," whose constant extension of government control over schooling, and advocacy of a system of education where the public, perceived in the mid nineteenth-century as being inherently "susceptible and weak," was a "family" that "required the parental interference of the state," to be achieved through free and compulsory schooling.³¹ This metaphor of the state as a collective parent to the child had been instituted and promoted by Ryerson as early as the 1840s.³²

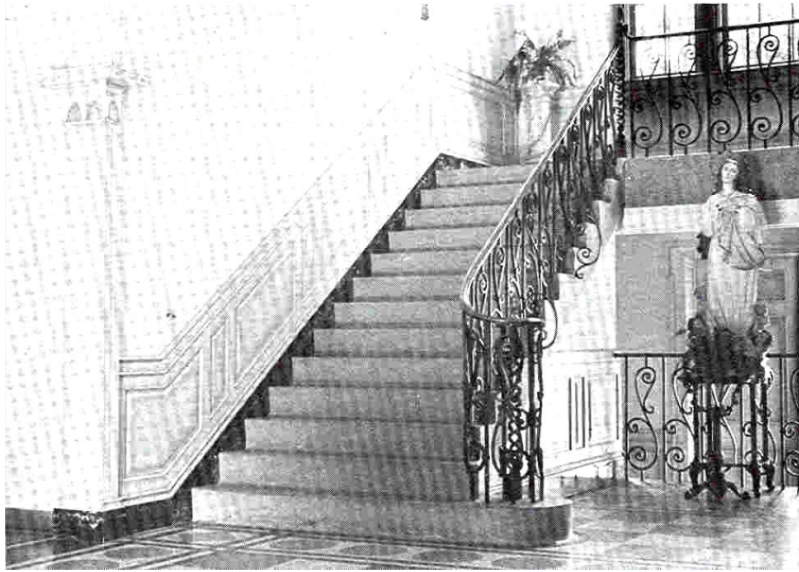
Marian iconography also signaled a variety of meanings associated with female piety but allowed women religious to "construct and negotiate their own belief."³³ As teaching Sisters, the Loretos utilized Marian imagery not only to reassure visitors and parents of the maternal quality Loretto Academy had to offer the young girls but also to reinforce the sexual segregation of both the Sisters and students: the Loretto School for Girls proclaimed itself a school distinctly for girls who were taught only by women.

³⁰ Ibid., 192. The Holy Family was enshrined on the front lawn of Mount St. Mary, but a statue of the Virgin Mary could be found in the front entrance hallway of the school.

³¹ Alison Prentice, "Nature, Order and National Education: The Government as Parent," in *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: 1977), 170-1.

³² See John C. Carter, "Ryerson, Hodgins, and Boyle: Early Innovators in Ontario School Museums," in *Ontario History*, 86: 2 (June, 1994): 120.

³³ Roberta Gilchrist, *Material Culture*, 144.



Front hallway, with marble staircase and youthful Virgin Mary
Source: *Loretto Academy, Hamilton, Centennial 1865-1965*
(Courtesy Loretto Archives, IBVM)

Martha Vicinus' work on the architectural significance of women's schools and colleges indicates that buildings often resembled large houses, with good reason. This domestic imagery offered parents the assurance of their daughters' protection and separation from the city and street. Parents in the 1860s feared nothing worse than co-educational schools³⁴ and perceived the world outside their daughters' institution as being rife with prostitution and drunkenness. The world verged on the brink of chaos, and the potential for class warfare, as Alison Prentice writes, made the school promoters insist on order: "Nature was portrayed alternatively as 'chaos' and 'order.' As chaos, nature was to be feared; as order, she was to be imitated and loved."³⁵ Loretto's centennial yearbook praises the domestic character of the original building, its quiet (passive) location, and doors leading to narrow passages, symbolizing the containment of women in spaces. There are references in the 1861 Constitutions to two lay Sisters appointed to visit the house each night to examine windows and outer doors to ensure that they are properly

³⁴ For example, the newly constructed St. Lawrence school on Ferrie Street in Hamilton's north end, converted from "The Malt House," educated the girls upstairs and boys downstairs. See Patrick Brennan, *Resilient Roots: A Short History of Catholic Education* (Hamilton, Ontario: 1994), 4. HPLSC.

³⁵ Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters*, 171.

locked.³⁶ Lay Sisters, in particular, were instructed to be silent and docile.³⁷

The grounds extended over several acres and were thickly studded with a variety of shrubs and trees, including rose bushes, “stars of Bethlehem” and the wisteria vine. There was an orchard on the left with well laden fruit trees and nearer to King Street, the haw, mountain ash and walnut trees.³⁸ The *Hamilton Herald* declared the school “one of the most attractive education establishments in Canada.”³⁹ A wrought-iron gate enclosed the grounds. The association of women and wilderness was central to nineteenth-century traditions of nature as being “healthier, safer and more beautiful than the unpredictable city ... this widespread belief that women required protection from the dangers of urban life meant that they were removed or separated from centres of power” in urban areas.⁴⁰ It was the portress’ duty, the keeper of the gate, to refer all persons, letters, notes and messages to the Superior without giving information to anyone regarding the parcels and letters received, keep the front door closed, and lock the door by nine in the evening.⁴¹

Adornments in the school and convent were also important indicators of material culture. The bell, for example, was customarily used by the Loretto Sisters when a nun was dying to summon all members of the community who were free from duty with their pupils to assemble in the Infirmary in order to assist the dying with their prayers.⁴² The bell, likened to the authority of Christ, signalled to the Sisters that they must obey. Obedience, to the Loretos, was the most important vow. The 1861 Constitutions implored that the “strictest union should exist” between the local and Chief Superior – “a union founded on obedience.”⁴³ Vicki Bennett argues that church bells were especially valued by Anglicans for their “mystical signification”⁴⁴ and by the Catholics for their “effect of

³⁶ *1861 Constitutions*, “Rules for Lay Sisters: Of Those Who Visit the House at Night,” 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, “Rules of Lay Sisters,” 4.

³⁸ Agnes Walsh, “Memoirs, Loretto Academy: 1881-1890,” 1. IBVM Archives.

³⁹ Herald Scrapbooks, 19 December 1908, VM6 Miscellaneous. HPLA.

⁴⁰ Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873-1913* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), in AnnMarie Adams, “Rooms of Their Own: The Nurses’ Residences at Montreal’s Victoria Hospital,” *Material History Review*, 40, (Fall 1994), 32.

⁴¹ *1861 Constitutions*. Articles 6-7, “Of the Portress.”

⁴² Margaret Costello, *Life and Letters*, 68.

⁴³ *1861 Constitutions*, Article 33.

⁴⁴ Vicki Bennett, *Sacred Spaces*, 185.

monumentality.”⁴⁵ More importantly, Bennett notes that towers, steeples, and bells were favoured by religious denominations that had strong Church-State relations.⁴⁶ The old convent spire, symbolic of power and monumentality “stood proudly in the midst of Hamilton’s expansion in which it acknowledge[d] participation because of the unbroken line of homemakers and professional women who ... streamed through the Convent gates into the city’s thoroughfares.”⁴⁷

The material culture of the chapel, the kitchen, dining rooms, and classrooms reveal how the personal mobility of nuns, their religious identities, and their perceptions of sexuality were inextricably linked to how they were allowed to utilize the constructed space within the Loretto building(s). Bennett writes that “the liturgical requirements of the Roman Catholic mass” and the daily offering of the Eucharist required a fixed altar, and therefore contributed to architectural differences between Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. To Roman Catholics the chapel was, above all else, a place to worship and therefore a private space. The chapel at Loretto Hamilton was initially situated on the second floor, and was constructed to accommodate the Sisters’ requirement for daily Mass and the reception of the Sacraments and Eucharist. Bishop Farrell had made clear in his 1865 letter to Mother Teresa Dease that he would provide the confessors and priests to perform these duties. The chapel’s interior was simple and modestly sized because nuns could not perform masses,⁴⁸ reflecting again, the gender differences and relations between the Sisters and the local priest. Only the priest, for example, would have been allowed to wash the corporals, purificators, and palls that were used at Mass.⁴⁹ The Sisters’ vow of poverty would have precluded any unnecessary adornments within the chapel, convent, or school. In addition, the chapel, from 1865 to 1872, would have been the only meeting place at Mount St. Mary where the Sisters and the priest or Ordinary⁵⁰ were allowed to meet, and when they did meet the Sisters would have followed a code of conduct that mandated modesty. The male authority figure, whether he be Ordinary, priest, physician, or workman, was not permitted to walk around the convent without the accompani

⁴⁵ Ibid., 47.

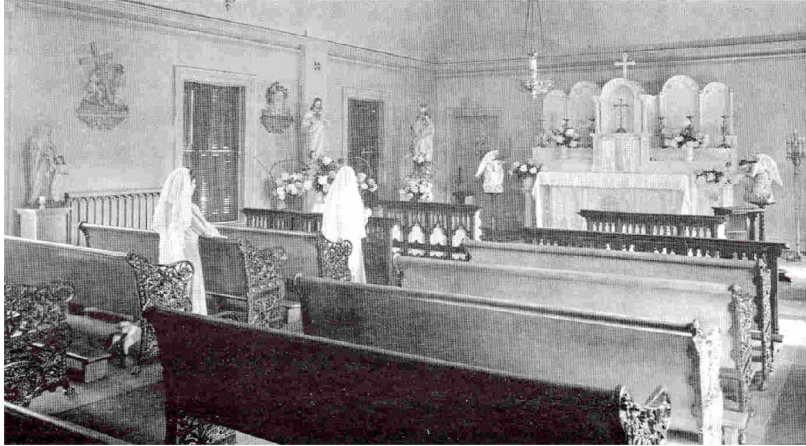
⁴⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁷ *LOMAR*, 1965. HPLSC.

⁴⁸ Roberta Gilchrist, *Material Culture*, 97.

⁴⁹ *1861 Constitutions*, Article 6.

⁵⁰ Bishop



The chapel, situated on the second floor
Source: *Loretto Academy, Mount St. Mary, Hamilton*
(Courtesy Loretto Archives, IBVM)

ment of one of the Sisters.⁵¹

Men were to be allowed into the house during “necessities”: to say Mass,⁵² to cure an ailing Sister or to repair buildings. Religious men were forbidden to enter private or particular rooms, but only common or public places – initially the workroom, infirmary and garden, and later into the parlour and auditorium. Excepting their Confessors, the Sisters were not allowed to speak alone to religious men “for many reasons” not specified by the Constitutions of 1832. By 1861, however, the Constitutions were relaxed in matters pertaining to male visitors. The Bishop could now visit a house as often as he wished and thought proper. Each part of the house was to be made available to him, and any Sister was permitted free access to him during his visitation.

The dining room of the original building (1865-1872) was situated on the main floor, with the kitchen sited off from the chapel and bedrooms to easily receive incoming supplies from the outer court.⁵³ There are no references or photographs to suggest that the Sisters had

⁵¹ *1861 Constitutions*, Article 10.

⁵² Only priests appointed by the Bishop were allowed into the Loretto convent or were able to say Mass. Priests unknown to the Sisters and without a *celebret* were forbidden to say Mass. See *1861 Constitutions*, Article 9.

⁵³ Roberta Gilchrist argues that in medieval cloisters, incoming supplies were received from the outer court.

their own vegetable garden, engaged in animal husbandry, or where the hearth and fire or storage area might have been located. In other words, there is no evidence of economic self-sufficiency at Mount St. Mary. In the school's first few years, the teaching Sisters themselves tended to the daily domestic work of the convent: provision of meals, care of boarders, rooms, convent and school areas; laundry, and ordering food supplies from the local butcher, grocer, and other merchants. As enrollment soared and the number of courses multiplied, lay Sisters performed the daily chores of the convent and school.

Throughout its history, 50 per cent of the lay Sisters⁵⁴ working as domestics at Loretto Hamilton were of Irish or Scottish decent or Irish immigrants themselves. In fact, between 1865 and 1900, all domestics (7) were either born of Irish immigrants or were Irish immigrants (2).⁵⁵ Catherine Kavanagh (1839-1869), born in Ireland, was the eldest to have entered the Loretto house in 1868 at the age of 29. The youngest was Catherine Kinsella (1853-1928), who entered at the age of 15. The average age of those entering the Hamilton house was 23. Of the domestics employed at Loretto before 1900, almost half had been born in Hamilton. Sisters Martha, Lucy, and Bede tended to housekeeping duties in the 1880s while Sister Perpetua dusted the chapel and Sister Petrenella was portress.⁵⁶

The entire charge of the lay Sisters was delegated to the Mistresses of the house who ensured that their charges not only kept the house and grounds clean and in order, but “observe[d] the silence, submission and retirement befitting their state and occupations.”⁵⁷ The values of the lay Sisters were slightly different from those of their choir counterparts. They were to observe order, cleanliness, punctuality, be active, obey and revere the teaching Sisters “because of their vocation.”⁵⁸ Charge of the kitchen went to the Dispenser whose duty it was to “prevent waste” in

⁵⁴ Nine of the eighteen domestics employed at the school comprise the 50 per cent. See Sister Mary Aloysius Kerr, *ibvm*, *Dictionary of Biography of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in North America* (Toronto, Ontario: 1984).

⁵⁵ The percentages are based on information obtained from the *Dictionary of the IBVM*.

⁵⁶ Walsh, “Memoirs,” 1. IBVM Archives.

⁵⁷ *1861 Constitutions*, Article 36.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Articles 4, 6.

order to feed the poor who often came to the gates, and front door⁵⁹ of the Loretto house in Hamilton.⁶⁰

There was a large excess of young women over young men in the most marriageable age groups.⁶¹ Widowhood between 1851 and 1871 formed a significant part of the life cycle for many women,⁶² and only 50 per cent of Irish born Catholic women had married by their late twenties.⁶³ It is not surprising then, that working as domestics was a propitious alternative to being single for Irish Catholic women and girls. Where previously domestics had been living in extended households, by 1870 the nuclear household had become the norm. Forty per cent of 15 to 17 year old Irish born Catholic women worked as domestics, yet only 43 per cent of Irish born children aged 9 to 11 attended school, compared to 87 per cent of Canadian-born Irish.⁶⁴ At a time when Canadian Protestants were sending more of their school age daughters to schools than sons because of lack of suitable employment opportunities for their daughters, Irish Catholic girls whose fathers were unskilled or semi-skilled labourers were even less likely to attend school than were Irish Catholic boys.

Classrooms were indicative of these class distinctions at Loretto Hamilton. From 1865 to 1892 the classrooms were situated on the ground level. It was here that the students learned English, poetry, elocution, piano and harp, vocal music, drawing and watercolour painting, arithmetic, “terrestrial globes,” Latin, and French. According to Bayley and Ronish, it was common in the mid-nineteenth century for middle-class Catholics and non-Catholics in England to send their daughters to “cheap and ladylike” convent schools to be taught “French culture and manners” and Italian.⁶⁵ In fact, sciences, classical languages, and literature were taught to males and they were rewarded with certificates and diplomas. Females, “lacking rigorous analytical thought,” were restricted to studying music, art, and modern languages, and were

⁵⁹ Ibid., “Rules of Lay Sisters: Of the Portress,” 6. The Portress was required to notify the Superior of any poor people who came to the house for alms, and allot food as the Superior so ordered.

⁶⁰ Ibid., “Rules of Lay Sisters: Of the Dispenser,” 4, 6.

⁶¹ Katz, Doucet, and Stern, *Industrial Capitalism*, 287.

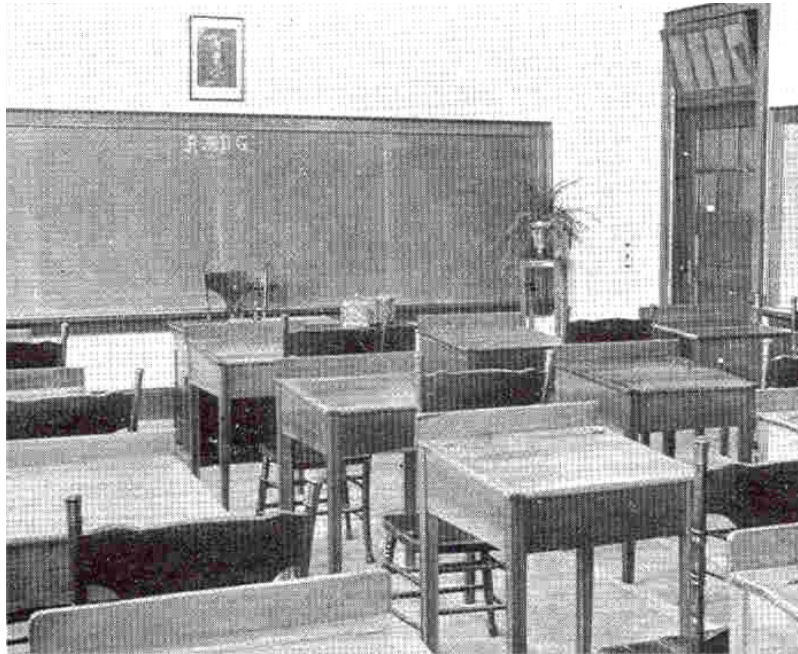
⁶² Ibid., 290.

⁶³ Ibid., 261.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 261.

⁶⁵ Susan Bayley and Donna Yavorsky Ronish, “Gender, modern languages and the curriculum in Victorian England,” in *History of Education*, 21:4 (1992), 373.

awarded for their “accomplishments”⁶⁶ in these subjects. The result was the continuation of a stratified society that limited access to the professions to males in the middle and upper classes.



A “light and airy classroom situated on the ground floor
Source: *Loretto Academy, Hamilton, Centennial 1865-1965*
(Courtesy Loretto Archives, IBVM)

The Constitutions of 1861 reveal that the Sisters were to endeavour to instill in the children’s minds a “spirit of true and solid piety, both by word and example.” The Sisters were only to speak to students during schools hours, and never to speak to them about the affairs of the house, private affairs of other Sisters, or their confessors. If a child could not be

⁶⁶ The accomplishments were the preferred mode of education for young women for most of the nineteenth century. It was a definitive female education that encouraged young women to “excellence in music, modern languages, and painting with an understanding that female achievement must not be used in the public sphere.” Very often, the decidedly “masculine” subjects of Latin, Greek, Mathematics, and commerce were absent from such a curriculum. For a more detailed discussion of the accomplishments see Marjorie Theobald’s “‘Mere Accomplishments?’: Melbourne’s Ladies’ Schools Reconsidered,” in *History of Education Review*, 13:2 (1984), 74.

disciplined in their faults of “stubbornness, insincerity, improper words or unbecoming levity,” she was to be expelled.⁶⁷ By 1908, however, the Sisters were instructed to instill the students with “the fear of God and of eternal punishment and the hatred of sin.”⁶⁸ Separate rules and admission criteria appear for the first time in the 1908 Constitutions. Those “too stupid or slow to learn ... [or who are] unwilling or unable to learn” must be dismissed.⁶⁹

The Sisters provided a good quality education in the arts, religion, discipline and good manners. Mary Ward’s philosophy of education had incorporated three ideals: academic excellence, devotion to the church and the perpetuation of the virtues of womanhood. Academic excellence referred to the fullest development of each student’s mental capacity. The more one truly developed one’s intellectual powers, Ward believed, the more truly human one became. The Catholic housewife, mother, nurse, teacher, doctor, or office-worker had to be able to explain the principals of Christian doctrine according to the life she lived. A Catholic woman had the freedom to do what she believed was right, and it was her duty to be Christian and womanly, and therefore be a credit to family, country, school and church. Honesty, integrity, and generosity formed the foundation for the characteristically feminine qualities of modesty, gentleness, compassion, and openness of heart. This balance between enforcing strict discipline and providing comfort and guidance to the students was characteristic of a Loretto education. Sister Victorine (1856-1911), for example, had distinguishing qualities as a teacher and Superior whose “strong, womanly penetration and common sense united with a most winning sweetness and simplicity of manner.”⁷⁰

By 1879 there were 30 boarders and 70 day scholars enrolled in six classes. Physical education was introduced in the late 1880s, as Captain Clark of Guelph visited the school on Thursday afternoon for calisthenics in the refectory:

There was hurrying and scurrying to push back the desks and chairs to make the required space for the drills, then at the sound of the approaching footsteps through the refectory, all was silent to greet the general “good afternoon, girls” of the Captain.⁷¹

Eventually a gymnasium was built in 1892 with the construction of the second wing. This concern with health and exercise is evident in the 1908 Constitutions. Girls were to eat only nourishing and well-cooked

⁶⁷ *1861 Constitutions*, Article 23.

⁶⁸ *1908 Constitutions*, Article 449.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 449.

⁷⁰ *Dictionary of the IBVM*, .74.

⁷¹ Walsh, “Memoirs,” 1. IBVM Archives.

food. No “outside” food from parents was allowed.⁷² The Sisters believed there was “health in movement, particularly in the open air. It was “unnatural” to have the girls “sit too long and remain still.”⁷³

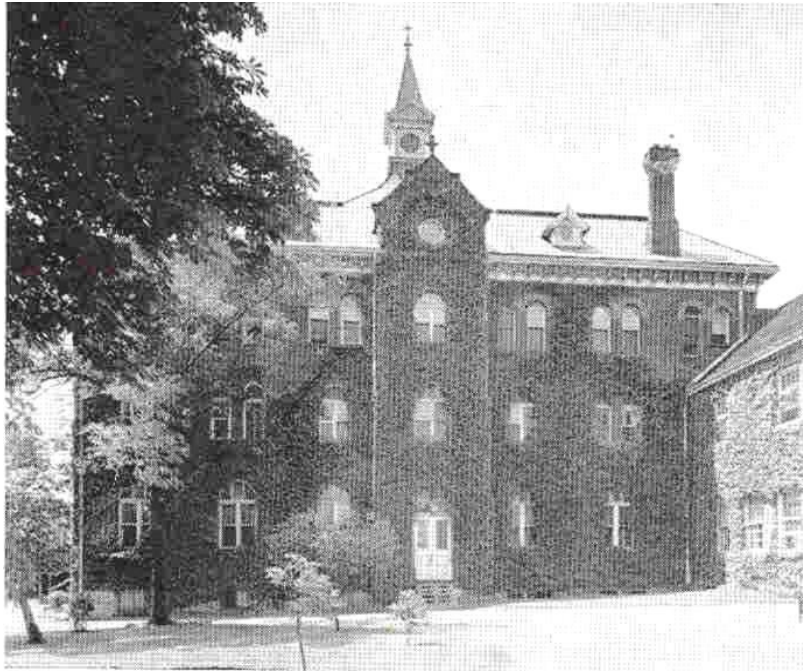
The Prize List of 1879 indicates that the curriculum was becoming more academically rigorous with the inclusion of French conversational, dictation and composition courses, English elocution, epistolatory, correspondence and literature, German, Logic, Mathematics, Political Geography, Chemistry, Astronomy, Geometry, Algebra, Botany, British and Canadian Geography, and school philosophy was demanding the teaching of Christian doctrine. Three years later, the Loretto School for Girls would witness the construction of additional classrooms to accommodate the increasing the numbers of students and varied and growing number of educational courses.

The introduction of compulsory schooling in 1871, a change in curriculum whereby education was now being provided to women and girls for preparation for a career outside the home, and the great increase in the numbers of students necessitated the construction of an additional wing. In 1892, a grand five-storey auditorium wing was erected with a dormitory for boarders, dining rooms, kitchen, sleeping rooms for the Sisters, a vast attic,⁷⁴ and classrooms and music rooms, as music, drama, and art were now offered in the curriculum. The Loretto Sisters, limited by finances and space, had had to share the recreation rooms, libraries, parlour, and most other rooms (excepting the dining rooms and sleeping facilities) with the pupils, as the 1861 Constitutions indicate.

⁷² *1908 Constitutions*. Article 469.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Article 471.

⁷⁴ In Victorian times, state-of-the-art medical science made high ceilings a priority for every home and fresh air a priority for every child. Consequently, many upper-class children were sent to drafty attics out of concern for their health, an event that often resulted in more severe illness.



The Auditorium Wing. Constructed in 1892
Source: *Loretto Academy, Mount St. Mary, Hamilton*
(Courtesy Loretto Archives, IBVM)

The 1965 Loretto Yearbook proudly claimed that the 1892 auditorium housed “the finest Music Hall” in the city, the only one with a permanent stage. The highlight of the new Loretto building appears to have been the stage where “little beginners were first introduced to the Crib of Bethlehem, to Santa Claus, to Toyland and to Fairyland.” Older students learned to sing, dance, or recite on the stage. Public speaking, debating, acting out Shakespearian tragedies and comedies, choral singing, piano recitals, and other forms of “cultural training for the Senior girls” occurred on the stage. The 1908 Constitutions, however, were also careful to point out the dangers of dances and theatres and “devouring books of all kinds.”⁷⁵

Loretto, in 1866, was primarily an institution that reproduced the manners and culture of the ruling elite, even though many of its students were daughters of poor Irish Protestant clergymen and entrepreneurs and not the ruling elite. In Upper Canadian society, wealthy (and not so wealthy) parents invested in education. A father’s occupation also

⁷⁵ *1908 Constitutions*, “The Method of Instructing the Pupils in the Christian Life,” 184.

mattered, independent of income. Gidney and Millar found that schooling was a form of patrimony for children who would not or could not inherit the family business.⁷⁶ This reproduction in societal values was apparent during the events that took place in the school auditorium. Prizes in amiability, order, personal neatness, early rising, regular attendance, and good conduct reflected the Victorian ideals, rituals, and manners of a dominant capitalist and patriarchal society. In fact, convocations in the auditorium often provided entertainment for local and visiting dignitaries: in 1866, two Bishops, a Vicar-General, and many clergymen were in attendance for the distribution of prizes day. Lacking an auditorium, a partition between the school room and refectory were dismantled by the students and teachers in order to erect a stage.⁷⁷

By 1889, the content of education had undergone considerable revision. In Hamilton's Loretto Academy, departmental courses of study were being taught in 1890. By 1894 a commercial course was added, even though only a few students enrolled. Higher education for girls was still a preparation for a cultured Christian home life, the development of intellectual and artistic skills, of the domestic arts and the matter of grace in manners and deportment. The idea that Canadian life would soon provide a leisure class of its own, whose role in life would be social and benevolent was dissolving with newer ambitions. Education would be expected to equip young girls as well as boys for making their own livelihood. These changes in education brought about the construction of a wing in 1892.

The period from 1870 to 1900 also witnessed a tremendous amount of school building activity around the old St. Mary's Cathedral, necessitated by the introduction of compulsory schooling and increased immigration. In 1871, Bishop Crinnon had opened the new Model School. This school was later known as Sacred Heart and subsequently, St. Mary's Girls' School. As Patrick Brennan notes, this school was the beginning of an organized approach by the Catholic school system to providing Catholic secondary education for boys and girls in Hamilton until 1912 with the erection of Cathedral, an all girls' secondary school that specialized in commercial courses.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Robert Gidney and Winnifred Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Kingston, Ontario: 1990), 136.

⁷⁷ Walsh, "Memoirs," 1. IBVM Archives.

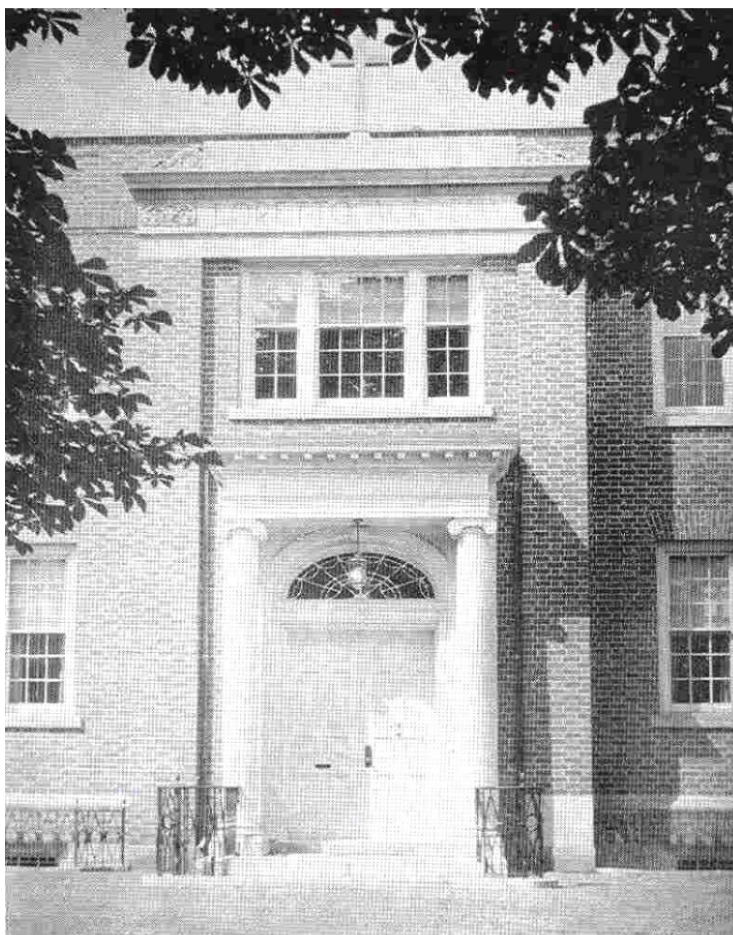
⁷⁸ Patrick Brennan, *Resilient Roots*, 2. Cathedral School later became St. Mary's Lyceum and should not be confused with Loretto Academy.

The early years of the twentieth-century were difficult for the Loretto Academy. In 1906, financial difficulties forced the Sisters to sell part of the property along Ray Street, resulting in over crowding so that a temporary science room that had been set up adjacent to the dormitory was moved to the parlour section of the academy. Benefactors contributed \$250 towards the expense of this improvement.

To accommodate increasing numbers of Junior students, in addition to the new wing, a house at 88 Proctor Boulevard in Hamilton's east end was purchased in 1915 for the elementary grades and a music centre. Previously facing Main Street, the school had been turned to the east, away from the busy thoroughfare. There were eighteen large rooms in the three-storey residence, well lit by windows on three sides, with an assembly hall on the first floor. A sun and rest room on the top floor allowed a magnificent view of the bay and lake on the north and mountain on the south. The location was ideally situated within a desirable residential section and convenient distance of the city's transit line. The building's location and structure was similar to that of the west end school: the grounds were landscaped, the rooms spacious and the site enclosed and protected from perceived immorality beyond its gates. This newly accredited modern languages institute, equipped with "special facilities," provided a ten-week scholastic term for its day pupils. The Loretto Sisters taught art (china painting, and oil and water colours) and music (preparing its pupils for examinations in university or Conservatory courses) there.⁷⁹

By 1933, with 350 students and 60 of them enrolled in commercial courses, a third wing to the west end property was built of brick in the Georgian style. Georgian refers to the continuation of the English Renaissance and Palladian Classicism practiced in England and the colonies during the eighteenth-century. This style of architecture is characterized by its simple, uncluttered designs: a gabled roof, classical cornice, flat boards, and double-hung windows. There is a classical symmetry of the floor plan with the central hall flanked by one or two rooms. Columns frame the main doorway, with the front door having six to eight panels, with smaller panels in the middle. Windows are symmetrically placed. The roof is hipped, and the entire building is usually constructed in wood or brick.

⁷⁹ "New Day School in East End," in *The Hamilton Spectator*, 6 August 1915.



Georgian Style Main Entrance, 1933
Source: *Loretto Academy, Hamilton, Centennial 1865-1965*
(Courtesy Loretto Archives, IBVM)

The new addition at Loretto Academy provided a standard-sized gym with gallery, modern science department, more classrooms, music rooms, and art and commercial departments. During the summer and fall the lawns, flowers and trees were described as “making a lovely, restful scene.”⁸⁰ The administration building was comprised of four rooms: guest rooms, parlours, reception room, and a large library. Changes in architecture reflected changes in the curriculum. The school building itself housed eleven standard high school classrooms, a soundproof

⁸⁰ “New Building for Loretto Academy,” in *The Hamilton Spectator*, 8 July 1933.

typing room, chemistry laboratory, a large art room, reference library, domestic science department, and a music corridor of five rooms. Other rooms included the classroom wing, washrooms, recreational rooms in the basement, a cafeteria, and a full locker room for street clothing.

The reason for the 1933 expansion can be found in the 1922 Constitutions, namely that Loretto be competitive with public schools, especially during the Depression (1929-1939) years when wealthy parents who had lost their fortunes and holdings might be tempted to transfer their daughters to the free public system: “the rules and systems followed by other schools, especially the Public Schools are to be adopted as far as necessary, that our schools may not appear to be inferior to them.”⁸¹ That the building was constructed in the simple, non-decorative Georgian style reflects not only the Sisters’ vow of poverty but also their prudence in constructing a less costly building than a Gothic one might warrant during the Depression years. The 1908 Constitutions reveal that the Sisters counselled the students in their course of study⁸² for them, according to “her rank or condition, and her talent and aptitude.” All students, regardless of class or wealth, performed “manual arts” in order to avoid what the Sisters perceived to be the deadliest of the Sisters’ sins – sloth: “the root of all evil.” Older students learned domestic science and bookkeeping.⁸³

In a brief submitted by the Loretto Academy to the Hamilton Wentworth Separate School Board in 1967, the Sisters indicated that of the then existent buildings, part of the older building was over 100 years old. This three-storey building housed the auditorium, three junior school classrooms, the chapel, the Sisters’ recreation room, and living quarters and was cited as being “antiquated, unsafe [and] a fire hazard.”⁸⁴

Throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, the school system was grappling with increasing immigration and the post-war baby boom. As a result, new elementary separate schools were constructed and by 1912, Hamilton had its first separate high school. A late 1940s survey of 150 high school students enrolled in grades 9 to 11 indicates that Loretto Academy might have been planning to expand on the mountain.⁸⁵ The survey also reveals, however, that the Sisters’ were opposed to expansion on the mountain for a number of reasons: Mount St. Mary was centrally

⁸¹ *1908 Constitutions*, Article 443.

⁸² *Ibid.*, Article 445.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Article 445.

⁸⁴ “Brief to be Presented to the Separate School Board on Behalf of the Loretto Academy,” page 2, 1967. IBVM Archives.

⁸⁵ The Hamilton “mountain” is a misnomer. It is actually part of the Niagara escarpment but is popularly referred to as the “mountain.”

located in the downtown district and close to stores, doctors, and dentists; there was no sewage or electricity on the mountain; there could be no grade school on the mountain because Our Lady of Lourdes (an elementary separate school) at Mohawk Road East was already located there; and families living on the mountain could not afford the Loretto school fees. The Sisters acknowledged that wherever they were to expand, the fees would have to increase by \$200.⁸⁶ By 1963 the boarding school was closed and the Sisters embarked on a five year commitment from the diocese to raise \$500,000 through parish donations to expand and sustain existent buildings and their operating costs. The 1967 Brief reveals that the Sisters requested a science laboratory, a gymnasium, cafeteria, a principal's office, a secretary's office, faculty room, music room, and two equipment storerooms. The operating costs of grades 1 to 10 would be paid by the HSSB, grades 11 to 13 would be operated by a Board of Governors, and any building program would be financed by parish donations to the extent that revenue was available and adequate. By 1968, however, the Sisters were informed that the sum of \$500,000 would have to be doubled to finance building costs. In a concerted effort, former students presented a petition to the Hamilton diocese, urging it to give financial aid to sustain operating costs, while the Sisters offered to defer their teachers' salaries to subsidize the school. Unfortunately the elementary private school consisting of grades 1 to 8 closed in September, 1968, and the secondary grades one year later.

Nothing remains of the buildings that once were the Loretto school, academy and house – the buildings were torn down in 1971. The Loretto Sisters eventually went on to teach in some of Hamilton's Catholic high schools. Portions of the building were donated to the Royal Botanical Rock Gardens in Burlington, Ontario. The former Mount St. Mary site is now a parking lot for a nearby Presbyterian church and a small garden tended by the children of Strathcona public elementary school. The material culture of Loretto Hamilton reveals that the history of women, and particularly women religious, has been overlooked. This study has addressed only minute aspects of the remarkable story that the Loretto buildings have to tell.

⁸⁶ "Loretto Academy, Hamilton." IBVM Archives.