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# An Immigrant Drama: The College of St. Catherine and Phi Beta Kappa

Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ

Two major obstacles stood in the way of the College of St. Catherine receiving a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in 1934: it was Catholic and for women. No Catholic institution of higher education had been awarded a chapter of the nation's most prestigious liberal arts honor society since its establishment in 1776. The tardy opening toward women's colleges signaled by Vassar's admission in 1899 had begun to break down barriers in that regard only to be countered by uneasiness in the 1920s over the growing number of women being elected to Phi Beta Kappa.<sup>1</sup> Debate among delegates when the committee on qualifications recommended St. Catherine College for a chapter at the 1934 triennial council exposed yet other admission barriers. The college, founded in 1905 and graduating its first baccalaureate students in 1913, was regarded by some as "too young." Others saw its scholarship requirements as "indefinite," its endowment too small and its indebtedness too great. But most disconcerting, it was a Catholic college, for women. In the frank, not to say demeaning words of one delegate, "If Phi Beta Kappa is to begin taking Catholic institutions why not start with the Catholic University, Georgetown, Fordham, or Notre Dame instead of with 'this little girl's college'?"<sup>2</sup>

A delegate from another women's college, Miss Hahn of Hunter, offered the rejoinder that "the fact that it is a woman's college or a Roman Catholic college should have nothing to do with [our decision]." The committee next spoke in defense of its recommendation, stating that "The Catholic University and Georgetown were carefully investigated . . . [the committee] preferred St. Catherine's because it was doing better work for undergraduates. The facts can be given if the Council so desires." Despite these interventions, the motion to grant a chapter to the College of

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1. Richard Nelson Current, *Phi Beta Kappa in American Life: The First Two Hundred Years* (New York: Oxford Press, 1990), 176-187.

2. Proceedings of the 18th Triennial Council debate as summarized in Phi Beta Kappa *Bulletin* (No. XI), 8. Quotations as given in the summary from the 68-page verbatim record of proceedings.

St. Catherine was defeated much to the chagrin of the committee.<sup>3</sup> United Chapters secretary, William A. Shimer, conveyed official word to the president of the college, Sister Antonia McHugh, in a letter at once both sobering and encouraging. “Phi Beta Kappa failed to approve the application for a charter for the establishment at this time of a chapter at the College of St. Catherine.”<sup>4</sup> However, Shimer reassured her, the actions of the committee on qualifications and of the Senate were favorable. Another application by the College “will receive fair consideration in the preparation of recommendations for the next Council.”<sup>5</sup>

Having been advised by the same letter that the next meeting of the committee on qualifications, the all-important first step in the preparation process for the next triennial, was barely three months away on December 18, 1934, Sister Antonia immediately set about preparing a second formal application. Meantime Shimer copied her on a letter sent to Prof. Myers of the University of Notre Dame in which he provided further helpful observations on the negative decision of the 1934 triennial council.<sup>6</sup> Notre Dame ought to be advised, wrote Shimer, that St. Catherine’s being “a small college with a large building debt weighed heavily against it.” Also, it was the first time recommendations for the granting of new chapters had been submitted to triennial delegates by a central committee, namely, the new committee on qualifications. The negative vote could be viewed as opposition to a centralizing tendency and an assertion of the rights of delegates over the committee rather than an expression of anti-Catholicism.

Shimer went on to reassure UND (and Sister Antonia by virtue of copying her on the letter) with respect to bias against Catholic institutions, noting somewhat naively that although two delegates had voiced objections on religious grounds, one of the two had “disavowed prejudice.” Notre Dame ought to be further reassured in this regard by the fact that Phi Beta Kappa’s constitution committee had under consideration a sentence eschewing prejudice: “There shall be no discrimination because of such characteristics as sex, race, color, or other belief.”<sup>7</sup> In sum, Shimer ventured the

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3. By a vote of 56 to 49, 72 votes being required for passage.

4. Shimer to McHugh, 18 September 1934, St. Catherine University Archives (hereafter SCUA). The College changed its name to St. Catherine University in 2009. The original name is used in this article except for archival attributions.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Shimer to Prof. Myers, s.d. [1934], SCUA.

7. *Ibid.* The role of anti-Catholic prejudice in the rejection of St. Catherine’s 1934 application as well as in the tardy granting of chapters to other Catholic institutions was later recognized by long-time secretary of the United Chapters, Carl Billman, responding to an inquiry on behalf of Trinity College, Washington, D.C.: “It is true that Phi Beta Kappa has chapters at only a few Catholic institutions. The reason is not prejudice, though it has to be admitted that at one time prejudice undoubtedly existed, but this has not been the case for many years.” Billman to Mrs. Henry Tanck, 5 April 1961, Trinity Washington Archives. The College of St. Catherine and the Catholic University of America were the only Catholic institutions whose faculties had been awarded chapters when Billman wrote. Shimer’s 1939 request to Sister Jeanne Marie Bonnett to help him respond to statements from a number of Phi Beta Kappa members “protesting the granting of Phi Beta Kappa chapters [i.e. to the College of St. Catherine in 1937] to Roman Catholic educational institutions,” confirms the existence of prejudice at least on the part of some chapter members.



*Derham Hall, 1905. Courtesy St. Catherine University Archives.*

opinion “that the Committee’s recommendations to the next Council will be received much more favorably and that there is a good chance that a charter will be granted to a Catholic institution.”<sup>8</sup>

The application for a charter sent to the committee on qualifications in 1934 revealed a college of impressive maturity in terms of corporate identity, endowment and finances, academic standing, student body, grounds and buildings, curriculum and library, and, most significantly, faculty. Incorporation separate from the St. Paul province of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet had coincided with granting of the first baccalaureate degrees in 1913. As of the early 30s the self-perpetuating board established in 1920 included an array of prominent lay trustees in addition to the priest-president of the College of St. Thomas and two *ex officio* trustees, the archbishop of St. Paul and the provincial superior of the province.

A total productive endowment of nearly \$3.6 million, of which just over \$3 million was contributed service of sister-faculty members as capitalized by the North Central regional accrediting association, placed St. Catherine’s in a respectable position among its peers.<sup>9</sup> Construction of five college buildings on the 110-acre campus

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8. *Ibid.*

9. As explained in the report, quoting from the Association of American Universities statement of procedure then in current use, “Services of members of the faculty contributed through permanent organizations for the support of educational programs may be capitalized in satisfaction of the requirement for endowment, the estimate of the equivalent to be based on payments ordinarily made for services.” St. Catherine’s had been influential in persuading the North Central regional accrediting association in 1916 to accept the services contributed by sisters, priests, and brothers teaching at Catholic colleges in place of

from 1914 to 1932 had created an indebtedness of half a million dollars on which regular payments were covering interest and reducing principal. Major foundations had expressed their confidence in the institution beginning with the Rockefeller Foundation's matching grant of \$100,000 for endowment in 1919 (matched with a \$200,000 gift from the Archbishop Ireland Education Fund).<sup>10</sup> A second grant of \$100,000 had facilitated erection and equipping of Mendel Hall in 1927, a handsome five-story building designed to hold fifteen laboratories as well as lecture rooms to accommodate instruction in the physical and biological sciences, mathematics, and psychology. A third grant, this time for \$300,000, had been applied toward construction of Fontbonne Hall for physical education and sports in 1932.

Meanwhile, grants of \$25,000 (1925) and \$15,000 (1930) from the Carnegie Foundation had supported a growing library collection comprising over 50,000 volumes at the time of the Phi Beta Kappa application. The student body had increased steadily over the years, from 51 in 1914-1915 to 576 as of the 1934 fall term. Graduates had gone on for advanced study to such institutions as the University of Berlin, the University of Budapest, the University of Cambridge, Prague, the Sorbonne, the University of Chicago, Columbia University, the University of Indiana, the University of Iowa, Johns Hopkins, the University of Minnesota (a large percentage), Northwestern University, the University of Wisconsin, and the Catholic University of America (a small percentage).<sup>11</sup>

Most importantly, a well prepared and professionally active faculty was responsible for implementing a curriculum featuring a full range of majors in the liberal arts and sciences. Keenly aware of the rejection of its recommendation at the prior triennial and the reasons behind the negative vote, the committee on qualifications was at

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the full cash endowment normally required for accreditation. See for an account of Sister Antonia's influence on the North Central decision, Helen Angela Hurley, CSJ, *On Good Ground: The Story of the Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Paul* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951), 244; and on later applications of the concept Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 185.

10. This represents the sole monetary contribution ever given to the college by the archdiocese. In 1900, Archbishop Ireland had made over royalties to his book, *The Church and Modern Society*, to the sisters whose door to door peddling of copies earned \$60,000 for the future college building fund. Ireland also influenced a wealthy local farmer, Hugh Derham, to give \$20,000 toward the first building, named Derham Hall in his honor, and a \$5,000 scholarship. Teresa Toomey, CSJ, "Chapters for a History of The College of St. Catherine St. Paul, Minnesota," (unpublished manuscript, SCUA), 16; Rosalie Ryan, CSJ and John Christine Wolkerstorfer, CSJ, *More Than a Dream: Eighty-Five Years at the College of St. Catherine* (St. Paul: Privately printed, 1992), 2. Ireland's indirect influence could be said to lie behind virtually all Sister Antonia's fund-raising success: the archbishop had provided her with a letter of introduction to his good friend, President William Rainey Harper, when she first enrolled at the University of Chicago. He and other professors who came to know and admire her during her matriculation there later proved to be of invaluable help, notably Dr. Charles Judd who argued successfully on behalf of her contributed services/endowment formula with the North Central Accrediting Association; and Dr. George Edgar Vincent who gave her advice and support first as president of the University of Minnesota (1911-1917) and then as head of the Rockefeller Foundation's General Education Fund.

11. Parenthetical notes on percentages are as given in the committee of qualifications report to the 1937 Triennial Council. Report, SCUA, 3.



*Mendel Hall, 1927. Courtesy St. Catherine University Archives.*

pains to note that no religious or political qualifications were required of teachers and that instruction in religious, economic, and political fields was not interfered with.<sup>12</sup> Academic qualifications were impressive for a comparatively young college, fourteen leading graduate schools in the United States and twelve universities abroad being represented among the institutions where faculty had earned advanced degrees.

Finally, the reporting team took special notice of the unique strength lent to the academic life and viability of the college by the sisters who then comprised over four-fifths of the faculty: “An inestimable security to the College lies in the lives of the faculty, permanently dedicated, without remuneration. Members are young, capable, and well qualified. It is the committee’s strong conviction that the College of St. Catherine has an alert, well trained, scholarly, interested and deeply intellectual group of administrators and teachers.”<sup>13</sup>

It is probable that the Phi Beta Kappa visitors were quite unaware of the dramatic story that lay behind the statistics presented in the 1934 chapter application. It was a story whose beginnings were shared by the College of Notre Dame, Maryland; Trinity in Washington, D.C.; the College of St. Elizabeth in New Jersey; and other

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12. *Ibid.*, 2.

13. *Ibid.*, 3. The teaching faculty was then composed of 33 sisters, 2 priests, neither of whom were full-time, and 12 lay men and women, 7 of whom were full-time.

Catholic women's colleges founded in the 1890s and the early 1900s.<sup>14</sup> Whereas all of the sister- teachers and administrators at St. Catherine possessed masters or doctoral degrees as of 1930, none held even a baccalaureate degree when the college opened its doors in 1905.

The college owed its movement over the first quarter-century of its existence from an institution of questionable academic standing to one of sufficient quality to merit a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa to three major factors. First in importance was the astonishing growth of the St. Paul province of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Added to this basic factor were the exceptional giftedness of many of the women who joined the congregation during this period of time, the ambitious pioneer spirit they shared, and the genius for leadership on the part of a few. Finally, the broadmindedness and belief in women's need for higher education on the part of John Ireland, bishop and then archbishop of St. Paul (1875-1918) and his sister Ellen (Seraphine) during her long tenure as provincial superior of the St. Paul province of the Sisters of St. Joseph (1882-1921) played a crucial role.

Expansion of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the upper mid-west and the maturing of the college as an institution of excellence was first and foremost an immigrant story. Ellen Ireland had enrolled at St. Joseph's Academy within days of the Ireland family's arrival in St. Paul from Ireland (via Boston, Burlington, Vermont and Chicago) and only six months after the Sisters of St. Joseph had come from St. Louis and opened the school. She had the distinction of being among the first members of the youthful province when she entered the novitiate 1858 at the age of sixteen directly following graduation from the Academy. Her early life history typified in many ways that of all the women who joined the province from its outset in 1851 through the period of the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> An immigrant who surpassed the formal education level of her parents by earning a high school diploma before entering the congregation, she was assigned to teach in sisters' parochial schools and academies during and following a two-year novitiate, being fully qualified to do so according to state teaching certification requirements of the day. She demonstrated throughout her long tenure in office an

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14. Tracy Schier and Cynthia Russett, eds., *Catholic Women's Colleges in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), particularly chapters by Kathleen A. Mahoney, "American Catholic Colleges for Women: Historical Origins," 25-54; Karen M. Kennelly, "Faculties and What They Taught," 98-122; and Mary J. Oates, "Sisterhoods and Catholic Higher Education, 1890-1960," 161-194; and Karen M. Kennelly, "Women Religious, the Intellectual Life, and Anti-Intellectualism: History and Present Situation," in *Women Religious and the Intellectual Life: the North American Achievement*, ed. Bridget Puzon (San Francisco: International Scholars Publication, 1996), 43-72.

15. Hurley, *On Good Ground*, 86-109; and Ann Thomasine Sampson, "Sister Seraphine Ireland," in *Seeds on Good Ground: Biographies of 16 Pioneer Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet* (St. Paul: Privately printed, 2000), 135-158. The second part of this publication (pp. 343-368) contains the names and birth-places of over 2000 living and deceased Sisters of St. Joseph who have contributed services in Minnesota since 1851. Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), situates St. Paul province investment in higher education and other developments within the larger context of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in the U.S.

esteem for education and a simple, deep piety modeled by her family life, espousing a personal commitment to the welfare of each sister and of the congregation as a whole much in the same manner as her parents had dedicated themselves to the support and nurturing of family amid the tumult of immigration and adaptation to a new country.

Development of the St. Paul province roughly paralleled upward immigration trends affecting the U.S. and Canada throughout the last half of the nineteenth century but was especially prolific in terms of new members and institutions under Mother Seraphine's leadership. Membership stood at 162 women the year of her appointment as province superior in 1882. It reached 913 by the year of her death in 1930. Expansion in the form of foundations was equally rapid, by 1930 being comprised of ten academies, thirty parochial schools, and two orphanages, as well as St. Agatha's Conservatory of Music and Art, St. Catherine's College, and five hospitals with fully accredited nursing schools.<sup>16</sup>

Immigrant origins constituted a strong common bond among the women listed in the college's 1934 application for a Phi Beta Kappa chapter. Three were immigrants themselves: Conchessa (Margaret Ann) Burbridge from County Longford, Ireland; Cecil (Mary Caroline) Devereaux from Prince Edward Island, Canada; and Mary Luke (Ingrid Elizabeth) Edwards from Norway. Eighteen, including Antonia (Anna) McHugh and her closest colleague from the earliest years of her deanship at the college, Sister Ste Helene (Florence K.) Guthrie, were first generation immigrants, while the remaining women claimed second generation status. Countries of origin for their parents and grandparents were, in addition to Ireland which accounted for the majority, both French- and English-speaking provinces of Canada; Germany; and Alsace-Lorraine.

Sister Antonia's upbringing illustrates the distance traveled by the 1934 faculty in personal and educational terms from humble circumstances of birth and sketchy educational opportunities to advanced degrees and professorial roles at the College of St. Catherine. Born May 17, 1873 in Omaha, Nebraska, Anna, as she was shortly thereafter christened, was the first-born in the family of seven children Patrick and Rosa Walsh McHugh were to raise in the states of Nebraska and North and South Dakota. Her maternal grandparents had emigrated from Ireland to New Hampshire and then to Illinois, while her paternal grandparents had emigrated from Ireland to the farming community of Lindsey in the province of Ontario, Canada.<sup>17</sup> There the McHughs had raised a family of eleven children, a number of whom, including Patrick, had set out to make their fortunes in the United States after finishing a common school education in Ontario. Encouraged by the captain of the Great Lakes steamship on which he had

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16. Hurley, *On Good Ground*, 265. A listing of foundations is given in Dolorita Marie Dougherty, CSJ, et al., *Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet* (St. Louis: Herder, 1966), Appendices pp. 427-479. On Minnesota's first arts school and seemingly the only such institution sponsored by women's religious organizations in the country, see Ann Thomasine Sampson, CSJ, "St. Agatha's Conservatory and the Pursuit of Excellence," *Ramsey County History*, 24, no. 1: 3-19.

17. Sister Antonia McHugh papers, St. Paul Province Archives (hereafter SPPA). See also Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ, "The Dynamic Sister Antonia and The College of St. Catherine," *Ramsey County History* 14, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1978), 3-18.



*Sister Antonia and family, 1898. Left to right, standing: John, Sister Antonia, Pat, Frank. Seated: Father, Mother. Front, seated: Roderick, Rose. Courtesy St. Catherine University Archives.*

worked as a deck hand for six years, Patrick had completed a two-year program of studies at a business school in the Lake Erie port city of Buffalo, New York before settling in Omaha where he had acquired a general store and met and married Rosa Walsh.

Within a year or two of Anna's birth Patrick had gone to investigate business prospects in Deadwood, South Dakota, jumping off point for gold mining in the Black Hills. The hotel he opened in Deadwood became the McHugh family's second home and the place where she learned to read at age four from Grace McDonald, a teacher in Deadwood's public school who boarded at the hotel. A year spent in Chicago with her mother, grandmother, and younger children to receive attention for her mother's health<sup>18</sup> occasioned six-year-old Anna's first contact with formal schooling and with sisters when she was placed in the second grade at old St. Patrick's conducted by the Sisters of Mercy. After a year in Chicago the family returned to South

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18. There was no physician in all of South Dakota at the time; "Recollections of a Pioneer Childhood," McHugh papers, SPPA. This account, probably penned by a member of the group of sisters who opened St. Catherine's in 1905, Sister Beata Galvin, contains many colorful details based on conversations with Sister Antonia.



*Sister Antonia studio portrait, ca. 1930. Courtesy St. Catherine University Archives.*

Dakota, settling this time in Custer where Mr. McHugh was county sheriff, owner of the Black Hills' first brickyard, and share holder in a mining claim.

Annie again had Miss McDonald as her teacher when she attended public school in Custer. This experience of formal education was cut short before two years were up by family moves, first to Grafton, North Dakota; then to a farm near Walsh City; and then to Langdon where the family finally settled, temporarily in a sod shanty in order to prove a homestead claim and ultimately in the fine wooden Victorian house to which Annie, then Sister Antonia, returned for her first home visit as a Sister of St. Joseph. Contact with this congregation had come at age twelve when her parents sent her for one year to St. Joseph Academy in St. Paul to prepare for her first communion. Her longest stretch of formal schooling followed soon after when it was decided to send her to Winnipeg to St. Mary's Academy conducted by the Montreal Sisters of the Holy Name. There she acquired an excellent command of French and an enduring love for history and the arts as well as the basics of mathematics and the sciences, the latter without benefit of any laboratory work.

The months and years between formal school attendance were filled not only with the usual work and diversions of children growing up in large families on the frontier in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but also with a good deal of informal education through reading<sup>19</sup> and parental example. Rosa McHugh's piety and generosity

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19. According to her later recollections, the books were classics: she had read all of Shakespeare before the age of twelve. *Ibid.*, 7.

made a deep impression on the young girl who later recalled her mother's kind hearted willingness to feed every tramp who came to the door. The McHugh parlor accommodated missionary priests and neighbors for the celebration of Mass on those rare Sundays during the family's residence in South Dakota when priests visited. On other Sundays, Mrs. McHugh customarily gathered the family at ten o'clock and knelt facing toward their former parish church in Omaha for the duration of that parish's Mass.

Annie's teenage years in boarding schools were interspersed with travel with her father who often took her with him as he negotiated such business as securing the county seat for Langdon and negotiating routing of the new Great Northern Railroad to the advantage of that farming community. The summer following her high school graduation was spent with her father in Bismarck where he served as an elected delegate to the constitutional convention that implemented North Dakota's move from territory to statehood.

The young woman's introduction to university education came in her early twenties subsequent to entering the Sisters of St. Joseph novitiate in St. Paul at age seventeen. Recognizing her ability and anticipating the need to keep pace with teaching certification requirements, Mother Seraphine and her council selected her along with several other recently professed sisters to begin baccalaureate studies during summers at the University of Minnesota. She would be thirty-six by the time she completed baccalaureate and masters degrees at the University of Chicago, 1902-1909, by means of part-time study through correspondence courses and seminars pursued while teaching at St. Joseph Academy and the newly opened College of St. Catherine and one year of full time study.

The unwritten set of goals she adopted when named Dean of the college in 1913 reflected experiences of an itinerant prairie childhood and the arduous life of a young professed sister called upon to fulfill multiple roles while pursuing the credentials that would qualify her to teach at and help develop a college worthy of the name. They also reflected Archbishop Ireland's forthright embrace of American culture and insistence that Catholic institutions equal or surpass their secular counterparts in terms of quality,<sup>20</sup> and Mother Seraphine's concurrence with her brother's views. Said to have regretted aloud that she was thirty-six before she earned her master's degree and forty before she saw New York City,<sup>21</sup> Sister Antonia made it a rule that sister-faculty be given the opportunity to complete doctorates before they were thirty-five, and that travel within the U.S. and in Europe be a normal component of graduate studies. Universities where sisters matriculated were to be selected primarily with a view

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20. Ireland's position in the 1890s on collaboration with state-supported public schools rather than creation of a completely independent parochial school system amply illustrated his views. See Hurley, *On Good Ground*, 210-214; and Marvin R. O'Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 322-47.

21. Hurley, *On Good Ground*, 245. The author wrote from first-person knowledge as a student at St. Catherine's during Sister Antonia's first years as dean.



*Derham Hall seniors and collegians, ca. 1913. Courtesy of St. Catherine University Archives.*

toward quality and reputation in the intended field of study rather than for such factors as Catholic affiliation.

Sympathetic as Mother Seraphine was to the college enterprise and always enthusiastic in her personal support for Sister Antonia, general support did not always translate into agreement on details. This was particularly true when it came to assigning newly professed sisters to the college. Talented young sisters were relatively plentiful but never sufficient to meet the incessant demand for staffing of the province's numerous academies, parochial schools, and hospitals. Monetary resources were typically stretched to the limit providing for the undergraduate education of sisters much less subsidizing extended graduate study or travel in Europe. One first-hand observer of the tension involved in getting the most promising young sisters assigned to the college noted that Sister Antonia often found it easier to secure substantial amounts of money from foundations in New York than to win a point with her religious superiors concerning sisters' study or travel!<sup>22</sup>

The women whose assignment to the College of St. Catherine faculty was secured by reason of Sister Antonia's influence more than fulfilled her hopes for development of a sister-faculty equal in every way to their lay peers in the best American colleges

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22. Toomey, "Chapters for a History," 11.

and universities. Although few experienced the degree of pioneer itinerancy that had marked Antonia's youth, her immigrant roots were shared by all beginning with Sister Ste Helene (Florence K.) Guthrie. The farm in southeastern Minnesota on which Florence Guthrie was born in 1883 had been homesteaded by her Irish-born father in the 1870s. German ancestry came through her mother whose parents had immigrated to Wisconsin around the same time. Devout Catholics who wanted for their bright daughter a better education than was available in the nearby rural village of Blooming Prairie, the Guthrie's had sent Florence to St. Joseph Academy in St. Paul for the upper grades and high school.<sup>23</sup>

Sister Antonia who had taught Florence at the Academy maintained a correspondence with her from the time of her graduation in 1903, through her matriculation at the University of Minnesota where she earned a BA in 1907, and her entrance into the novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph the fall of 1909. Apart from one year's teaching at another of the community's academies, Sister Ste Helene remained Sister Antonia's indispensable confidant and partner at St. Catherine's from 1911 onward, exercising the dean's authority during Antonia's frequent fund-raising trips, managing the budget and a voluminous correspondence, and inspiring students in her literature courses. She became dean in 1929 when Antonia was named president.<sup>24</sup> The first sister to enter with a baccalaureate degree, she earned an MA at the University of Minnesota in 1918 and paved the way for later sisters at Oxford where she attended lectures and tutorials from 1924-25.

An extraordinarily gifted teacher of writing, she launched many students on writing careers and became close friends of numerous literary figures, notably Edna St. Vincent Millay who made several visits to campus to read her poetry and frequently sent her work to Ste Helene for critique prior to publishing. New England essayist Mary Ellen Chase, also a frequent visitor to campus, paid a warm tribute to Ste Helene in an autographed copy of *The Golden Asse and Other Essays*, "with deepest love—and with gratitude for all that Saint Catherine's has given to this little book."<sup>25</sup>

Sister Anna (Alida Angeline) Goulet, missioned to St. Catherine's the same year as Sister Ste Helene, became the mainstay of its music department during her long tenure there (1911-1971). Born of French-Canadian parentage (her father had been born in Quebec) on a farm near Hamel, Minnesota, her education prior to entering the community had included two years at Sacred Heart Academy in Missoula, Montana,

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23. Details of sisters' family and educational background here and throughout from official records and personal files, SPPA.

24. Archbishop Ireland had remained titular president of the college until his death in 1918; the office remained vacant until 1929.

25. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1929. The essays "On Kitchens and Cloister" (31-37) and "Mystical Mathematics" (101-108) depict the college as Chase experienced it in the 1920s. Her more extended reflections using the names of the college and many of its sister-faculty appear in *A Goodly Fellowship* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1939) in the chapter "The College of St. Catherine," 227-243. Chase joined the faculty as a part-time lecturer in 1923 at Sister Antonia's invitation and spent three summer terms, 1927-1929, residing on campus and teaching English literature and writing.

and another two years at Holy Angels Academy in Minneapolis where she graduated in 1901. Unlike Ste Helene, she completed all her higher education degrees after coming to St. Catherine's including a baccalaureate at Columbia University (1917), and masters and doctoral degrees in music at Chicago Musical College while still in her early 40s (1923 and 1925).

Study with the great virtuoso pianists of her time: Percy Grainger, Xavier Scharwenka, Rudolf Ganz, Edward Collins; and organists Clarence Eddy, Josef Bonnet, and Marcel Dupre, further enriched her teaching and writing. Dupre, acclaimed worldwide as the greatest living authority on the organ works of Johan Sebastian Bach, took her on as a private pupil for the year she spent in Paris where she also studied with the famous pianist, Alfred Corot. Hundreds of teachers used her two-volume series on music appreciation, *A Pageant of Our Musical Heritage*, as a guide to the teaching of vocal music both sacred and secular.

Two sisters assigned to the St. Catherine's faculty in 1914, Marie Teresa (Frances) Mackey and Anna Margaret (Catherine) Normile, enhanced the already strong fields of applied arts and classics, all the courses in Latin and Greek having been taught up until then by a superb priest-classicist, St. Thomas College professor P. J. O'Brien. Sister Marie Teresa, daughter of Irish immigrants who had settled in the river town of Stillwater, Minnesota, had entered the community in 1886 at age nineteen. Her evident artistic gifts, cultivated while at St. Joseph Academy and then at St. Agatha's Conservatory, had prompted the community to send her to Europe where she studied for three years at the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Florence and the New Art Circle in Munich. During her twenty-year tenure at St. Catherine's (1914-1934) she chaired the art department and taught history of art and architecture as well as drawing, painting, and other studio arts while furthering her education through summer study at such centers as the School of Fine and Applied Art in New York City and the Pennsylvania Art School.

Sister Anna Margaret, born on a farm near Willmar, Minnesota which had been settled by her father from County Clare, Ireland, had entered the community as a nineteen year old in 1912. The alacrity with which she was assigned to the college in 1914, a year prior to completing novitiate training, was indicative of the relaxed interpretation of canonical requirements prevalent at the time as well as of the intellectual powers she demonstrated in early novitiate classes. Called upon to chair the department of classical languages and literature from the outset, she went on to earn a baccalaureate in Latin and mathematics at the college (1916) before earning master of arts and doctoral degrees at the University of Chicago (1919, 1927) in Latin and Greek. Her doctoral thesis, *Latinity of the Letters of St. Boniface and of Lullus*, made a significant contribution to the new DuCange Dictionary of Medieval Latin while her work over many years at the university earned her the reputation of a saintly person as well as a scholar.

Romance languages at the college found a long-time champion in the next woman assigned to the college, Sister Eleanore (Marie) Michel. Born in St. Paul in 1888 to parents who had left Germany just five years before, the father motivated by a desire

to avoid military service under the Kaiser, she had entered the Sisters of St. Joseph directly after graduating from St. Joseph Academy and had been assigned to teach at one of the community's other academies even before first vows. Her tenure at St. Catherine's had begun at Antonia's urging in 1915, her linguistic gifts having been observed in summer school courses at the college. Like Sister Anna Margaret, she assumed administrative responsibility from the outset, being named to chair the Spanish department the year she arrived, and made steady progress toward a doctorate, earning a BA in Latin and German at St. Catherine's in 1916, an MA in romance literature and languages at the University of Minnesota in 1918, and a PhD at the University of Chicago in Spanish and romance languages in 1930. Her extensive travels included periods of study in Madrid, Florence, Paris, and Cuba.

The decade closed with Antonia securing the assignment directly from the novitiate of two women the importance of whose later faculty roles can scarcely be exaggerated: Sisters Jeanne Marie (Ruth) Bonnett in 1918, and Sister Teresa (Harriet) Toomey in 1919. The daughter of first generation immigrants to Wisconsin, Sister Jeanne Marie had been born on a farm near Magnolia, Minnesota but had entered the community from Grand Forks where her family was then living and where she had attended North Dakota State University for a year. Within seven years of coming to St. Catherine's she had earned a BA there with majors in Latin, German, and English; an MA at the University of Minnesota in educational psychology and psychology; and the degree of *Docteur en Pédagogie* at the University of Louvain, Belgium, at the age of 28.

During her early years as chair of the psychology department and personnel director, Sister Jeanne Marie worked closely with Sisters Antonia and Ste Helene formulating policies and plans for college development. It was to her that Antonia turned in 1934 to write the successful application for a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. Without an extraneous word and replete with clearly displayed statistics, the 138-page document set the stage for the persuasive arguments the committee on qualifications would present to the triennial chapter delegates three years later. It was also to her that Phi Beta Kappa secretary William Shimer had recourse when various delegates wrote him to express objections to the admission of Roman Catholic institutions to the honor society. Her closely reasoned "Response to four objections entitled 'Factors which operate to disqualify Roman Catholic educational institutions for fellowship with Phi Beta Kappa,'" was a model of gracious, incisive, and erudite apologetics replete with references drawn from diverse historical and contemporary sources.<sup>26</sup>

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26. The arguments were that "infallibility and revelation" infringed on private judgment; that "an essential aim of the church's educational system in this country is to contribute to the aggrandizement of the Roman Papacy;" that "the Catholic educational system in the United States is under the control of the Jesuits, the most powerful and militant of Catholic orders, whose extra-religious activities have caused its expulsion, at one time or another, from most of the important countries of the western world;" and that "the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church, as individuals, are not free agents, but are subject to orders from their superiors, like the officers of an army." Quotes from Shimer's summary of objections, Bonnett papers, SPPA.

Sister Teresa Toomey's parents had emigrated in the 1870s from French-speaking Canada to St. Paul where her father secured a position as private secretary to railroad tycoon, James J. Hill. Attracted to the religious life by what she observed of her sister-teachers at St. Joseph Academy, she deferred entrance until after completing a BA degree at the University of Minnesota, majoring in rhetoric, English, History and Philosophy, and being elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Assigned to the college a year before pronouncing first vows, Sister Teresa perhaps came closer than any of the new sister-faculty to being an intellectual. She gained an MA in philosophy and English at the university in short order (1922) but took over twenty years to complete a PhD there in history and philosophy and drawing on these disciplines as well on the fields of art and religion to write a dissertation on *Florentine Renaissance Paintings as a Source for the Study of Religious Life in Florence*.

The pace with which Sister Antonia persuaded province superiors to send promising young sisters to the college picked up in the decade of the twenties with assignment of fourteen women who subsequently completed advanced degrees in key liberal arts and sciences fields between 1920 and 1929. Assignment of Sister Lioba (Margaret) O'Brien was somewhat of an anomaly as she was already 48 with a well-established reputation as a teacher in the community's parochial schools and academies with seemingly no likelihood of being assigned to earn advanced degrees and teach at the college. Daughter of immigrant parents from County Clare, she had entered the community in 1884 and had completed baccalaureate studies at St. Catherine's only in 1916 following the usual laborious route of full-time teaching combined with summer study. Very likely Sister Antonia had identified her by then as a promising faculty member; by 1920 she had earned an MA in Literature at the University of Minnesota, and by 1921 had joined the college faculty.

Although she never earned a doctorate, she pursued courses toward that end at the nearby University of Minnesota where she attracted the attention of Mary Ellen Chase who later described her as possessing "one of the richest minds I have ever known."<sup>27</sup> Sister Lioba's assignment to St. Catherine's was quickly followed by that of two other women who were to enrich the college's burgeoning program in English literature and writing: Sisters Antonine (Anastasia) O'Brien and Maris Stella (Alice Gustava) Smith. Both came from first generation immigrant families, Sister Antonine's of Irish and Scotch origins and Sister Maris Stella's of mixed English, French, German, and Russian strains.

Four years apart in age, and from divergent urban and rural backgrounds, their life stories became closely intertwined from the time they joined the Sisters of St. Joseph and were assigned to the college faculty. Both began teaching at St. Catherine's while earning baccalaureate degrees there, Antonine in English and classical languages (1926) and Maris Stella in English and music (1924). Both responded enthusiastically to Sister Antonia's desire that they qualify for admission to Oxford University and

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27. Chase, *A Goodly Fellowship*, 229-30.

pursue degrees there. The two returned from England in 1933 with Oxford masters degrees in hand and went on to distinguished teaching careers at the college and, on the part of Sister Maris Stella, to notable achievement as a published poet.

The three women assigned to the college in 1923, Sisters Eucharista (Margaret) Galvin, Cecilia (Marion) Manion, and Jeanne d'Arc (Susan) Hurley, enhanced faculty credentials in the liberal arts fields of history, music, and the sciences as well as in the future department of home economics. Sister Eucharista, the oldest of the three at age 30, had begun work on a baccalaureate at St. Catherine's during summers between teaching in the community's parochial schools and academies in North Dakota and Minnesota. She completed her BA in 1924, majoring in history, English, and French, and moved on rapidly to earn MA and PhD degrees in history and political science at the University of Chicago (1925, 1929). Born the fourth of nine children on a farm in southeastern Minnesota to first generation Irish immigrant parents, her grandparents had come to St. Louis, Missouri from Ireland in 1856 and thence by covered wagon to Minnesota Territory. With pioneer family memories, a keen love of history, and a talent for leadership reminiscent in many ways of Sister Antonia, she readily took up teaching and administrative roles at St. Catherine's, succeeding Antonia as president (1937-43).

Sister Cecilia's family heritage was rooted in Ireland and rural areas of Nebraska and the southwestern Minnesota town of Marshall where the sisters had opened an academy in the late 1800s. Her musical abilities were recognized when, after teaching in the sisters' schools for several years after entering the community, she was assigned to the college, completed her BA degree in music and English, and accompanied Sister Anna Goulet for a year's study in Paris. Her later studies included an MA in music from Columbia University (1932).

Sister Jeanne d'Arc's grandparents on both maternal and paternal sides had emigrated from Ireland to Wisconsin and West Virginia. Born on a farm near the small rural town of Tintah, Minnesota, she had entered the community from Fairmount near Fargo, North Dakota. Within a year of completing her novitiate and being assigned to the college, she had earned her BA there with majors in chemistry, history, and English (1921). MS and PhD degrees followed, at the University of Chicago, in home economics with emphases in nutrition, dietetics, and biophysical chemistry (1928, 1933).

The women sent to join the college faculty in 1924, Sisters Antonius (Mary Jane) Kennelly, Helen Margaret (Loretta) Peck, and Ann (Mary Genevieve) Harvey, came there immediately after completing the community's two-year novitiate, coming from families that had emigrated from Ontario, Canada to North Dakota (Kennelly), from Germany to Iowa and Minnesota (Peck), and from Ireland to New York and Iowa (Harvey). The fourth in a family of ten, Sister Antonius had been born in a new house built on a tree claim; her three older brothers had been born in a shanty built by her father to prove his homestead claim. She was surprised and delighted when her parents, following up on a recruitment visit by two sisters from St. Catherine's, determined to send her there to college. Unable to pay tuition beyond the freshman year, she had taken a two-year leave during which she taught all grades in the one-room

district school in St. Thomas, North Dakota where she had earned her own high school diploma. Within ten years of resuming her studies at the college she had entered the community, earned a BA degree at St. Catherine's in chemistry and languages, an MA at the University of Minnesota in chemistry, and a PhD in chemistry, physics, and mineralogy at the University of Munich studying under Nobel Prize winner Dr. Heinrich Wieland. She returned with five trunk loads of the latest scientific equipment to help furnish labs in the recently constructed science building, Mendel Hall, and within a few years had collaborated with American professor G. T. Muhleman and others in the publication of *General Chemistry for College Students* (Burgess, 1937).

Sister Helen Margaret had entered the community from a small farming community in western Minnesota where her first generation German immigrant parents had settled. Assigned to the college directly after completing her novitiate, she earned her BA at St. Catherine's in English and both the MA and PhD degrees, in English, at the University of Chicago (1927, 1930), following which she fulfilled multiple faculty and administrative roles with distinction.

Sister Ann's family roots were decidedly Irish, her grandparents having emigrated from Ireland to New York and Iowa and her parents having settled in one of the thirteen Irish colonies Archbishop Ireland had founded in Minnesota.<sup>28</sup> She, too, had been assigned to St. Catherine's upon completing her novitiate, going on to earn a BA there in 1926 and an MA at Columbia University (1930) in elementary education with emphases in kindergarten and nursery education. The pre-school she established at the college ultimately became a key element in an early childhood education sequence complementing a comprehensive education major.

Next to join the faculty were Sisters Marie Ursule (Mary Lucy) Sanschagrin and Agnes Rita (Margaret) Lingl. Sister Marie Ursule capitalized on her parents' French Canadian origins by completing a BA in French and history at the college (1925), an MA in romance languages and history at the University of Minnesota (1930), and a PhD at Laval University in French literature, *summa cum laude* (1947). Her dissertation on the folklore of the Lavalois, published by the Laval University press in 1951, was highly regarded as the definitive work on the subject.

Sister Agnes Rita's parents had emigrated from Bavaria prior to her birth in 1900 in the boom and bust river town of Winona, Minnesota. She grew up learning a Bavarian German dialect along with English in a family and church steeped in old country customs, and eagerly embraced the chance to earn a doctorate in German when the opportunity presented itself. This occurred when Sister Antonia, noting the young sister's successful pursuit of a BA in German and history at St. Catherine's (1927) and an MA in Germanics at the University of Chicago (1929), encouraged her and Sister Antonius to seek American-German Student Exchange Fellowships to

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28. Graceville, Minnesota. By coincidence, Sister Helen Margaret had come from another of these colonies, DeGraff, Minnesota. On the colonies, see James P. Shannon, *Catholic Colonization on the Western Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

facilitate matriculation at the University of Munich. Both won the scholarships and returned, doctorates in hand, three years later, Sister Agnes Rita graduating *magna cum laude* with German language and philology majors and a *laudabile* for her thesis.

The decade closed with the arrival of three more women who were to make stellar contributions to the scholarly community at St. Catherine's: Sisters Marie Philip (Geraldine) Haley, Marie James (Vera Mary) Gibbons, and St. Mark (Margaret) Wirtz. In contrast to Sister Agnes Rita, Sister Marie Philip's attraction to the French language owed nothing to her family heritage which was first-generation Irish. The impetus for her achievements in this regard came instead from her teachers at St. Catherine's where she had come from the central Minnesota farming community of Willmar seeking a college education. Recognizing her native ability and potential, the faculty had guided her in applying for a French government scholarship to teach English in France after completion of her BA. There she had continued her studies in Latin and French while teaching in Saumur and Paris, and had subsequently entered the community (1925) while also meeting the University of Minnesota's requirements for an MA with majors in French and Italian. Her doctoral thesis at the University of Minnesota on Racine and the *art poetique* of Boileau was published in the Johns Hopkins series, "Studies in Romance Literature and Languages" (1938). During her lengthy tenure at the college she built up an outstanding department of French, co-founded the Catholic Renaissance Society, contributed to numerous professional journals, and conducted summer sessions in Brittany for high school teachers of French under the auspices of the National Defense Education Act throughout the late 70s and early 80s.

Sister Marie James' first-generation parents, Irish on the father's side, German on the mother's, had begun their married life in Chicago. A sense of the lingering spirit of rural pioneer days may be construed from the fact that although her father was regarded by colleagues as a "Chicago city boy," he kept a cow during his Chicago days, later following the fortunes of the stockyard and related investment business from Chicago to Detroit, Omaha, and Buffalo, New York, finally settling in St. Paul where their daughter completed high school at St. Joseph's Academy and entered the community. She taught at several parochial schools before being assigned to St. Catherine's where she completed a BA in chemistry (1930), going on to earn MA and PhD degrees in Chemistry at Columbia University (1934, 1942).

Sister St. Mark, from German immigrant parentage, had entered the community from Watertown, South Dakota, and had been assigned to the college upon completion of her novitiate in 1928. Her flair for the life sciences exhibited itself not only in advanced degrees—she earned a BA at the college in Botany and Chemistry and an MS at the University of Minnesota in Biology and Geography before being named chair of the biology department in 1932—but also in her later fruit tree grafting experiments and beautification of the campus as supervisor of buildings and grounds.

Last to assume their place on the roster of liberal arts and sciences sister-faculty members sent to the college through Sister Antonia's intervention were Sisters Annette (Margaret) Walters, Angele (Isabel) Gleason, and James Agnes (Mabel)

Fogarty. Arguably the most innovative and productive scholar in the first generation of St. Catherine's faculty, Sister Annette had been born in Elmwood, Wisconsin in 1910 of parents with German roots, her father a jeweler by profession who had immigrated in the early 1900s and her mother the daughter of earlier German immigrants, born in the rural community of Marine, Minnesota. Baptized as an infant in her mother's Lutheran faith, Sister Annette had entered the Roman Catholic church at age seventeen following graduation from St. Margaret's Academy in Minneapolis and had entered the community two years later.

Assigned to the college in 1931 directly following her novitiate, she earned a BA there in education and chemistry (1933) and an MA at the University of Minnesota in the field of psychology (1935). Yet to come at the time of Phi Beta Kappa visit was the completion of a PhD in psychology at the University (1941), a Diploma in Clinical Psychology from the American Board of Examiners in Professional Psychology (1948), and study and research at the University of Louvain (1952). It would be under her leadership as chair 1941-1960 that St. Catherine's would become the first psychology department in a Catholic college to treat the subject as a behavioral science making use of scientific developments and dimensions rather than as a minor branch of Catholic philosophy.

Sister Angele, the youngest of eight children born to parents one generation removed from Irish and French origins, was likewise a graduate of St. Margaret's Academy. She had entered the community following her sophomore year at St. Catherine's and returned there after pronouncing first vows in order to resume baccalaureate studies while teaching in Derham Hall.<sup>29</sup> After earning a BA in history and French (1924), she had gone on to earn an MA in European history at the University of Chicago (1929) and had completed all but the dissertation for a PhD there at the time of the Phi Beta Kappa application. Interruptions of advanced studies were so prolonged—she was appointed principal of Holy Angels Academy in Minneapolis and then of Derham Hall—as to discourage further doctoral study. Despite this disappointment, she rejoined the college faculty in the 1940s and gained the reputation of being a very effective teacher prior to her untimely death in 1962.

Sister James Agnes, daughter of first generation Irish parents, had entered the community from the farming community of Fairmount, North Dakota having met the sisters as a high school boarder at Derham Hall. Sent to the college at age twenty-two following her novitiate, she had earned a BS degree there in home economics and biological sciences and an MS degree at the University of Minnesota by the time of the Phi Beta Kappa review. Rising to the challenge put forth by Sister Antonia, Sister James Agnes had accepted appointment as chair of the new home economics department simultaneously with earning her baccalaureate and went on to guide its development as chair until 1974.

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29. Derham Hall was located on the St. Catherine's campus from its inception in 1905 to 1964 when it was moved several miles east of the campus to Warwick Street. The majority of sisters assigned to the college in its early days taught a mixture of high schoolers and collegians as part of their regular course load.



*Our Lady of Victory Chapel from the pond below.*

Augmented by still other fully credentialed sisters responsible for library and other services as well as for a hospital-based nursing sequence that would not become a college degree program for some years to come, the “permanently dedicated” community that so impressed the Phi Beta Kappa visitors with its promise for the future stability and excellence of the college came to over 50 women. As a group inspired by religious motivations, bound together by a daily routine of prayer and a shared history as Sisters of St. Joseph with recent immigrant roots, it was quite unlike the subculture of women scholars who lived out their careers at Wellesley and the other seven sisters colleges of the same era.<sup>30</sup> Mary Ellen Chase who had first-hand knowledge of both worlds was struck by the egalitarian, work-a-day spirit, commenting that “life [at St. Catherine’s] was far more sane and wholesome than is usual in assemblages of women elsewhere.” Sister Antonia “prayed while she hustled, and she hustled while she prayed. . . . Every nun, whatever her position in the order, whether she was teaching, studying, cooking, cleaning, or praying, was busy from morning to night” in the common enterprise of conducting the college.<sup>31</sup>

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30. See for comparison Patricia Ann Palmieri’s study, *In Adamless Eden: The Community of Women Faculty at Wellesley* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

31. Chase, *A Goodly Fellowship*, 239f.

Our Lady of Victory Chapel, the 800-seat church completed in 1924, served as a powerful focal point for the entire college community, faculty and students alike. Situated on the second-highest hill in St. Paul (the highest being the prominence on which Archbishop Ireland had built the St. Paul Cathedral in 1918), its front portal afforded a commanding view westward toward the Mississippi. Interior and exterior embellishments brought European and American art and architectural elements into a harmonious whole in a manner symbolic of Sister Antonia's vision for the scholarly enterprise of St. Catherine's.

It was there that the entire college community, faculty and students, assembled to celebrate news of the affirmative vote at the 1937 triennial chapter whereby delegates endorsed the recommendation that a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa be granted to the College of St. Catherine. Acting president of the University of Minnesota Guy Stanton Ford presided over the installation ceremonies in 1938 whereby the faculty of the college became custodians of the Gamma chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the University and Carleton College being proud holders of the Alpha and Beta chapters in the state of Minnesota.

Disabled the year before by a stroke, Sister Antonia had been succeeded as president by Sister Eucharista Galvin but was nevertheless sufficiently recovered to be present for and to savor the triumph of the occasion. Inaugural members of the chapter inducted at the time of its installation were Sisters Antonia McHugh, Eleanore Michel, and Jeanne Marie Bonnett as honorary and alumnae members; one member-in-course, graduating senior Maridee La Pointe; and five alumnae, Clara Glenn; Ellen Lord; Genevieve Ahern; Anne Condon Collopy; and Paula Frank.

The internal impact of acquiring a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa was all that Sister Antonia had hoped for in terms of maintaining a deep commitment to the liberal arts as the core of all the major fields offered at the college and holding forth high standards of achievement for students. Beyond the college, St. Catherine's persistence in the application process to the point of approval surfaced the latent bias that had long prevented the inclusion of institutions with Roman Catholic affiliations and paved the way for others beginning with the Catholic University of America in 1941.