

**WOMEN RELIGIOUS
AND THEIR CONVENT HIGH SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA:
A CASE STUDY OF THE PRESENTATION SISTERS
IN QUEENSLAND ❀**

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Introduction

Mainstream histories have provided few details of the women who established independent and order-owned convent ‘high’ schools in colonial Australia. Yet these Catholic religious sisters formed a women’s movement of significant proportions. The Presentation Sisters came to Queensland in 1900. Like their contemporaries who were the Sisters of Mercy, Good Samaritan Sisters and Sisters of St Joseph, the Presentation Sisters lived and worked humbly; too preoccupied with the business of establishing schools and surviving the exigencies of the period to compile written records of their achievements. Moreover, the Presentation Sisters practised a minor form of enclosure, and as a consequence, their history has remained hidden or obscured in public records until recent times. Their former social and physical enclosure and ideal of self-renunciation explain, in part, why their story has not been documented in mainstream histories and why the Presentation Sisters remained unknown in Queensland for the first half of the twentieth century.

This paper is concerned with the distinctive style of education that the Presentation Sisters brought to Queensland in 1900. It uncovers the story of two Presentation Sisters, Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden, who pioneered the provision of secondary education for girls in Central Western Queensland. In considering who these women were and what they did in their schools, this paper aims to reclaim their story and significance within the wider history of Queensland education.

The Tradition of Convent 'High' School Education

In the main, conventional histories have too often trivialised convent establishments as merely 'accomplishment' schools. Yet the curriculum and goals of convent high schools reflect a feminist and academic tradition that dates back to the Catholic female teaching orders in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹

The concept of a convent high school was the particular initiative of French noblewoman, Jeanne de Lestonnac, in 1606.² Interestingly, Jeanne was the niece of French humanist, Montaigne, (1533-1592). She began a girls' school in Bordeaux that appears to have been the first carefully planned convent high school, for which there were few - if any - precedents. Unlike the old schools, where students lived a monastic way of life within the convent enclosure, Jeanne pioneered a new institution that, as well as a boarding school, provided cost-free education in a 'day school', where girls came and went as they pleased. This meant that enclosed orders of religious women were now able to teach girls in a free day school, as well as a fee-paying boarding school, within the one convent enclosure.

Communities of women wanting recognition as a religious order were required to adopt enclosure – a rule symptomatic of the social and church control over women at that time. Male religious, on the other hand, gained canonical approval without it. One of the main reasons that congregations, like the Paris Ursulines and Irish Presentation Sisters, accepted enclosure was to secure permanence for their communities and schools. Although the Sisters were compelled to work within the social and ecclesiastical constraints of their period, they took pragmatic steps where necessary, to advance their educational goals.

In another innovative step, Jeanne de Lestonnac devised her convent school curriculum along the same lines as the Jesuits' recently developed Ratio Studiorum for boys. This indicates that Jeanne's school was concerned, not merely with the evangelising mission of the Post-Reformation Catholic Church, for she was equally concerned with the intellectual formation of girls; a dimension hitherto neglected in women's education. As news of Jeanne's

initiative spread quickly in France, the Ursuline Sisters in Paris were among the first to adopt the convent high school model for the advancement of girls' education.³

In 1771, a small group of Ursuline Sisters from Paris arrived in Ireland at the request of Nano Nagle and Bishop Francis Moylan of County Cork. Nano hoped the Ursulines would conduct the elementary schools that she had opened in Cork at that time. In a radical and defiant move, Nano was gradually reintroducing Catholic education in Ireland at a time when the penal laws continued to prohibit Catholic schooling in the country. Unfortunately for Nano, the Parisian Ursulines practised a strict form of enclosure, which did not permit them to conduct schools outside the domain of the convent that Nano had built for them. This meant that only one of Nano's seven schools came under their immediate supervision. There were six remaining schools for which Nano had to find suitable teachers and administrators. In response to this need, Nano subsequently founded the first native Irish religious order of modern times in 1775, which in 1805, after Nano's death, was granted final approbation as the Order of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (PBVM).

The Presentation Order was modelled on the Ursulines' constitutions, which included a special teaching vow that clearly defined the Sisters as a teaching order. The Presentation Sisters continued to expand and spread throughout Ireland, replicating the Ursuline pattern in their schools. This model placed equal accent on the intellectual, social, vocational and spiritual development of girls. Other Irish teaching orders such as the Brigidine and Mercy Sisters soon followed and they established their schools in Ireland along the same lines as the Presentation and Ursuline pattern.

Convent 'High' Schools in Colonial Australia.

Surprisingly, few historians have focussed on the particular style of girls' education known as the convent 'high' school, which was brought to colonial Australia by religious orders such as the Presentation, Mercy and Brigidine Sisters. The widespread Sisters of Mercy were more mobile than the cloistered Presentation Sisters and

were therefore the first to transplant the convent high school tradition into Australian schools. The Mercy Sisters established their earliest high school in Perth in 1846. Twenty years later, a small band of Sisters from the Presentation Convent in Fermoy, County Cork, in Ireland, arrived in Australia in October 1866. They came at the request of Bishop Daniel Murphy of Hobart, whose sister, Mother Mary Francis Xavier, was Superior of the Fermoy convent. Six young novices and four professed Sisters, including Mother Xavier, volunteered for the mission to open new schools in the colony of Tasmania.

Soon after their arrival in Hobart, the Presentation Sisters established St Mary's College, a convent high school with boarding facilities. A number of the Sisters had been pupils at the Ursuline convent in Blackrock, Cork, and thus transplanted in the curriculum of St Mary's College, the Ursuline syllabus with which they were so familiar.⁴ Numerous teaching Sisters in colonial Australia who were similarly taught in convent schools in Ireland and Europe also replicated this type of syllabus in their convent high schools. Other nineteenth century examples include, the Mercy Academy of Mary Immaculate, Melbourne; the Dominican Priory, Maitland; Convents of the Sacred Heart in Sydney and Melbourne; the Loreto Mary's Mount, Ballarat; the Brigidine Convent, Beechworth and All Hallows' School, Brisbane.⁵ The curriculum of these schools was often referred to as providing a 'superior education' or 'English education' in order to appeal to both the Catholics and non-Catholics in the new colonies. In actuality it was the Ursuline-type syllabus and it included the core subjects of grammar, foreign languages, history, geography, astronomy, the use of globes, writing and arithmetic.⁶

Convent Boarding Schools in Australia

In order to cater for children in regional and remote areas in Australia, the Presentation Sisters immediately modified their rule so as to establish boarding schools, which they did not do in Ireland. The Presentation order in Ireland provided only day schools for the poor and middle class; in part because other religious orders, such as the Ursulines, made adequate provision for wealthy families. In Australia, however, boarding schools were a function of distance

rather than privilege, thus most Presentation congregations readily adapted their rule to offer boarding facilities.

Boarding schools in Europe were predominantly exclusive establishments reserved for the upper class and aristocracy, while the pay day school was for the lower middle class. Both schools offered similar academic subjects, though the boarders received a 'finishing course'. The convent high schools, which women religious, such as the Mercy and Presentation Sisters, established in colonial Australia, were boarding schools in the French Ursuline pattern, except they combined the two upper educational levels that were separate in Europe, that is, the exclusive boarding school and the pay day school.

The emerging convent high school in Australia thus offered girls the 'refinements' of the European boarding tradition. These establishments were called 'high' or 'select' schools because they provided an enriched program of higher education beyond elementary level. They were not secondary schools in the modern sense as their students ranged in age from five to eighteen with no break in transition from primary to secondary. Religious Sisters also staffed and managed parish schools, keeping fees low and often waiving payments for low income families. These women became self-reliant in a short period of time by operating fee-paying high schools in addition to the parish schools they staffed.

The Mt Erin Convent in Wagga, Wagga.

In 1874, five Presentation Sisters, originally from County Kildare in Ireland, founded the Mt Erin Convent in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. The Kildare Sisters immediately sought a Papal indult to modify the order's constitutions in order to teach 'not only the children of the poor, but also those of the wealthy class' and to charge fees for the provision of 'select' education. Each Presentation congregation in Australia issued the same request to modify their rules to take in boarders. The apostolic work of these women, however, continued to reflect their founder's primary commitment to the educational needs of the poor and children in remote areas.

Mt. Erin became renowned for its high academic standards, particularly in the Riverina district. In 1899, for example, the College earned the unique distinction of being the only girls' school in New South Wales to obtain a Matriculation Pass for one of its pupils.⁷ It was from Wagga that the Presentation Sisters established their first foundation in Queensland. At that time, two young novices from the Mt Erin convent, Mary Madden and Alice Kennedy, were emerging as very competent teachers and were later to prove leading lights on the educational horizon in Queensland.

In spite of scant historical records, the story of Alice Kennedy and Mary Madden and their extraordinary educational vision and contribution to education in Queensland can be pieced together from convent annals, narratives, obituaries, tributes and the recollections of admirers and past students. Furthermore, Sr Rosa MacGinley's history of the Queensland Presentation Congregation's first sixty years, *A Place of Springs*, provides a valuable reference for historians.⁸

Alice Kennedy

Alice Anastasia Kennedy was born in Daylesford, Victoria, on 21 January 1876. Her father, Laurence Kennedy, migrated to Australia in the 1830s from County Tipperary and joined the flow of émigrés to the Victorian gold fields. Alice's mother, Mary Agnes (née Cummins), was second generation Irish, born in Geelong. Alice spent her formative years with the Presentation Sisters at the Holy Cross Convent High School in Daylesford and was taught the now standard syllabus of Presentation schools. It was advertised as:

All the branches of a superior education [ie. grammar, history, geography, astronomy, the use of globes, writing and arithmetic⁹] together with French, Latin, Euclid, Algebra, Book-keeping, Botany and Physiology.¹⁰

Proficiency in French conversation was regarded an essential branch of a lady's education. Its additional meaning for the Presentation Sisters derived from Ireland's dependency on the French Church during the Penal era and from the order's Ursuline heritage. Latin, Euclid, Algebra, Botany and Physiology were subjects associated

with boys' education, and were offered by few private girls' schools in Australia. The Presentation syllabus also provided useful subjects such as needlework, both 'plain and artistic' that enabled women to find employment. The Sisters became financially independent, earning income from tuition fees in Piano, Vocal Music, Violin, Guitar, Zither, Banjo, Mandolin, Painting in Oil and Watercolours, and Crayon Drawing.¹¹

The Jesuit emphasis on intellectual development was maintained at Holy Cross and girls were successfully prepared for the public examinations. Alice Kennedy completed her Matriculation for the Melbourne University during the 1890s, at a time when it was unusual for a girl to sit and pass such Matriculation examinations.¹² Although women were admitted to Melbourne University in the early 1880s, Matriculation was still widely considered an unnecessary finishing qualification for women.

In 1895, Alice entered the Presentation novitiate at Mt Erin in Wagga and there met Mary Madden who would become her novitiate companion and life-long colleague and friend.

Mary Madden

The story of Mary Teresa Madden begins in Galway, Ireland, where she was born in 1876. At sixteen, Mary sailed to Australia and joined the Presentation Convent in Wagga in 1892, knowing that she might never return home. Following the Education Acts of the 1870s and 1880s for compulsory, secular and free education, Australian clergy sought teaching religious to establish Catholic schools in their dioceses. It was to such a call that Mary responded. In his memoirs, Maurice O'Connor, an Irish-born Augustinian priest who lived in North Queensland for many years, provides the following recollection of his own departure from Ireland in the 1950s. It sheds some light on what Mary experienced sixty years earlier. He recalls twenty young girls embarking for the Presentation Convent in Perth, and like Mary, they were to be trained as Presentation Sisters:

When the time came to board...all were affected by the wailing and the weeping of the mothers of the young girls as they hugged and kissed the daughters whom they would not see again...Their families

had gathered to bid them farewell, not just for ten years, but for all the years of a lifetime.¹³

Mary Madden and other young aspirants were motivated to join the teaching orders by a profound sense of personal mission and faith. All too often this personal, religious dimension is left out of Australian historiography. The young women were also free spirits; for whom the religious life permitted them entry into a world of teaching, service and leadership, not readily available to lay women at that time.¹⁴ Natural leaders came forward as convent and school superiors. Women took greatest advantage of the opportunity to enter the field of education, which the Church had afforded them. Not surprisingly women entered religious teaching orders more numerous than men did.¹⁵ By 1880, there were thirteen different religious institutes of women in Australia.

Foundation in Longreach

In 1900, at the request of Bishop Joseph Higgins of Rockhampton, Sisters Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden were among five Mt Erin Sisters to travel to Longreach in Western Queensland to establish a convent and school. The five pioneering women from Mt Erin journeyed by rail from Wagga to Sydney and then by sea and riverboat to Rockhampton. It was noted in Convent annals that the Sisters could not find Longreach on any map available to them at that time.

They were welcomed in Brisbane, Rockhampton and Barcaldine by the Mercy Sisters, whose educational tradition as we have seen was linked to the Presentation Order in Ireland. The two congregations supported one another under raw pioneering conditions, essentially to provide educational opportunities for girls in regional Queensland, where none had existed before.

There had been no provision for the secondary education of girls in Queensland prior to the establishment of the Mercy Sisters' All Hallows convent school in Brisbane in 1861 and the Brisbane Girls' Grammar School in 1869.¹⁶ Colonial governments did not enter the field until early in the twentieth century and catered initially only for students in major centres. It was left up to the denominational

schools: the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and Scots' Colleges, to go to regional areas. Catholic schools were usually the first established and the most numerous. For a span of over fifty years, in fact, as educational historian Ronald Fogarty claims, from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth, convent high schools provided the only formal system of secondary education to girls in Australia.¹⁷

Dressed in heavy black serge, the five Presentation Sisters from Wagga arrived in Longreach when the outside temperature had reached 115 degrees Fahrenheit. The convent annalist reflected that:

Pioneering has little of the glamour that so many tales would have us believe of it – the heat of fierce western summers, the scarcity of drinking water, the hordes of flies, as well as the general lack of most of the common amenities of civilisation.¹⁸

In customary manner, the Catholic and secular press reported with alacrity the arrival of the Catholic Sisters to Longreach on 13 February 1900. Convent annals eloquently describe the 'triumphal arrival' of the Presentation Sisters:

The Longreach people honoured them with a procession [from the railway station] through the main street, cheering them along the route, while the [town] band played until they reached the Parish Church where addresses of welcome and speeches awaited them.¹⁹

A local newspaper reported that four marshals supervised the procession that was led by the town band. There followed the Friendly Societies in regalia, then the buggies that carried the bishop, sisters and parish committee, then the children, parishioners and general public.²⁰ *The Longreach Leader* suggested that:

Any effort at gauging the pleasure, which the arrival of the Sisters gave, would be out of place. In fact, the non-Catholic sections were so much in evidence on the occasion that a stranger might have been pardoned for imagining that the whole community belonged to the Ancient Faith.²¹

The annalist noted that some were 'intent on paying every respect to the Sisters, others drawn by mere curiosity, anxious to see what was

to them a new type of being – a Catholic nun.²² One observer remarked:

The arrival of these Sisters was something new to the West. We all wanted to see just what manner of woman would come out here and pioneer their order.²³

The early years were difficult with scarce drinking water, few amenities and little school furniture. Many European teaching orders had difficulty adapting to harsh Australian environments.²⁴ In the main, the Presentation Sisters from Wagga adapted to the oppressive hot summers in Longreach. They quickly modified the enclosure rule to permit travel in open carriages and changed the heavy serge material of their religious habit to a lighter fabric and made several smaller modifications.²⁵

One week after their arrival in Longreach, the Presentation Sisters opened St Brigid's parish school. Ninety children enrolled on the first day with the school requisites consisting of six desks and one blackboard.²⁶ In February 1902, the Sisters commenced a convent high school with boarding facilities under the title of Our Lady's College.²⁷ The impressive building was designed, as a virtual replica in wood, of the Mt Erin brick establishment. The College was the only girls' secondary school in Central Western Queensland, and remained so until the government High School Tops were established in the 1950s.

Mother Ursula Kennedy in Longreach

Mother Ursula Kennedy guided the newly founded Longreach branch of the order through all the initial difficulties. Under her leadership, Our Lady's College soon gained an impressive educational reputation that was in keeping with that of Mt Erin. As a teacher and administrator, Mother Ursula ensured that the range of cultural and academic subjects was balanced against the functional requirements of the Junior public examinations. The curriculum at Our Lady's, therefore, included English, French, Latin, Mathematics, Elocution, Freehand drawing, Plain and Artistic Needlework, and Callisthenics. In 1911, Mother Ursula formed the first class of candidates to compete in the Junior University examination,

established by the newly founded University of Queensland (1910). Though examination preparation was important, Annual School Reports consistently refer to the Sisters' chief aim of educating the whole person for life.

The Sisters' aim of training women to become self-reliant was at the heart of their educational mission. Vocational subjects were included in the commercial course, which was also offered after hours to local boys and girls, regardless of their religion, who sought employment in town businesses. Special classes in dressmaking were also available.

We gain a valuable glimpse into Mother Ursula's approach to education from a tribute by Archbishop Young of Hobart who attended the Presentation Convent in Longreach as a boy:

[Mother Ursula] gathered a group of five of her pupils and decided to put them for Scholarship. [She] taught us all the subjects for scholarship and I was fortunate to get an A Grade Scholarship. That was a turning point in my life, because if I had not gained that scholarship, it would have been impossible for my parents to send me to secondary schooling in Rockhampton with the Christian Brothers...

She used to gather us around a table in the old refectory...speaking to us informally. Her mind was most clear and acute and she always gave you the impression of a whole wide world completely outside the very limited little domain in which our minds moved in Longreach. ...I have sat at the feet of the learned in the Eternal City. I have spoken to some of the world's leading educationalists, but I have never met a better educator than Mother Ursula.²⁸

Mother Patrick Madden in Emerald:

In 1902, Sister Patrick Madden was among the founding community called to Emerald, an important railway depot and regional centre of a large pastoral district, to establish St Patrick's parish school. In 1906, she became Mother Superior of the Emerald convent where the school was initially conducted in the corrugated iron church building.

In a tribute to Mother Patrick by Archbishop Duhig in 1947, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of her Profession, he recalled that

under her administration, St Patrick's school received impressive reports from the inspectors:

The part played by Mother Patrick in the development of the Congregation has always been a large one...I was told by a school inspector that the Convent School at Emerald, founded and ruled by Mother M. Patrick, was the most outstanding school of Central Queensland...²⁹

St Patrick's school achieved high standards in music; equal to those attained at Mt Erin in Wagga and Our Lady's College in Longreach. Mother Patrick Madden was an accomplished musician and, in addition to conducting music lessons at St Patrick's, she taught many local children and adults to sing and to play piano and violin after school hours. She was also known for arranging concerts that became popular town events. Adults, not necessarily associated with the school or the Church, performed most of the items in these concerts. Although at first glance, Mother Patrick's town concerts might not seem very extraordinary, they were innovative actions for an enclosed order of nuns.

In providing education to children and adults not connected to their parish school or secondary college and by engaging with the townspeople at many levels, the Presentation Sisters undoubtedly enriched each community in which they served. It is small wonder that these women, like other religious Sisters, endeared themselves to people in country towns.

Music and Culture

In many rural areas in Australia, Catholics and non-Catholics valued ecclesial women for their contribution to the cultural development of their town community. Historians have referred to this as an acculturation process which many women religious initiated in school communities throughout Australia.³⁰

Sr Ignatius Kelly, who taught at Our Lady's College in Longreach during the 1920s, also conducted the adult choir of St Brigid's Catholic Church. The choir received wide acclaim for its impressive recitals and concerts. It performed these in the church for the townspeople as well as for the enjoyment of the parishioners. Sr

Ignatius co-ordinated these choral performances and still managed to comply with the requirements of enclosure. In practising a minor form of enclosure, the Presentation Sisters did not shut themselves away from the outside world; rather they were teachers whose apostolic mission or vocation was to serve others through education. Sr Ignatius printed concert programmes in the days leading up to the concert and probably distributed them to advertise the event. One programme was entitled, 'Grand Recitals of Sacred Classical Music'.³¹

Educational work in Yeppoon

In 1916, Mothers Patrick Madden and Ursula Kennedy purchased land in Yeppoon with a view to laying the foundation for a new school, St Ursula's College.³² The College was opened in 1917 and quickly became a leading educational establishment in Central Queensland. It attracted Queensland Catholic girls who were otherwise sent to southern boarding schools, even as far as Armidale, for their secondary education. St Ursula's was registered as a secondary school in 1920. In 1922, the first Junior University class was formed with four members, two scholarship holders and two boarders.

Even before establishing a foundation in Yeppoon, the Sisters had secured support from the local community there. The best-known example is the magnanimous donation the Sisters received from one local Catholic family in Yeppoon who donated half the price of the land on which St Ursula's College was built.³³ In his comments to the Rockhampton *Daily Record* in January 1917, Bishop Shiel referred to the apparent mutuality, which he had observed between the Sisters and the people of Yeppoon:

The Sisters have established themselves firmly in the hearts and the affection of the people of the West and why? Because they have learned to appreciate their beautiful, gentle characters, and because and especially, they have learned by experience to appreciate the grand, refined and thorough education they impart to their children. And no wonder. The Sisters have been remarkably successful both at Longreach and Emerald. The very satisfactory reports given by

Inspectors of State Schools show this, as also do their successes in public contest with other schools...³⁴

Foundation in Brisbane

Mothers Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden, led a community of Presentation Sisters from Longreach to Brisbane in 1924. This came in response to Archbishop Duhig's call for more Catholic schools in his archdiocese. During the preceding episcopacies of James Quinn (1859-81) and Robert Dunne (1882-1917) Catholic schools in Brisbane came to be conducted by only two religious orders, the Mercy Sisters from All Hallows' School and the Irish Christian Brothers. Mary MacKillop's Josephite Sisters came to Queensland in 1869; however they left the colony following well-documented difficulties. By 1900, only three other female congregations had schools in Queensland – the Good Samaritans, Josephites and Presentation Sisters – all in the Rockhampton diocese. Significant change came in 1915 when the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Cardinal Cerretti, visited Brisbane and called for the expansion of parishes, schools and religious orders in the archdiocese.

James Duhig, as Co-adjutor to Dunne, anticipated these reforms and invited the Longreach Presentation Sisters to Brisbane as early as 1914, urging 'Brisbane awaits the community. Come when you will there's a welcome for you.'³⁵ It took a further ten years for Duhig's hopes to be realised and before the Longreach Sisters were able to come. By this time, the archbishop clearly had in mind St Agatha's parish, Clayfield, as the Sisters' destination.³⁶

Duhig planned to reconstruct the Catholic school system in Brisbane by first inviting the religious Sisters he had known from his former diocese of Rockhampton in central Queensland to conduct the new schools. The gradual introduction of new teaching orders led to a diversification of the Catholic school system in Brisbane. It additionally brought to an end the Mercy Sisters' domination in education. The female teaching orders that came to Brisbane from 1915 to 1924 were the Sisters of St Joseph (1915), Good Samaritans (1916), Sacré Coeur (1917), the Ursulines (1919), Sisters of Charity (1920) and the Presentation Sisters (1924).³⁷

The Transition from Convent High School to Modern Secondary College

The intellectual tradition, which Australian convent high schools had inherited from Europe afforded them a smooth transition towards modern style secondary schooling and the academic rigour of public examinations. This transition became essential once women were accepted into the Universities of New South Wales and Victoria. From that time, the Mercies at All Hallows and the later Presentation Sisters in Longreach and Yeppoon were providing an academic curriculum that included foreign languages, literature, mathematics and some science.

Prior to the establishment of the University of Queensland in 1910, the Mercy and Presentation Sisters prepared students for the Sydney University Junior and Senior Public Examinations.³⁸ In 1876, Sydney University permitted Queensland students to enter its Public Examinations. As early as 1880, All Hallows' School presented five students for the Sydney University Junior. They were the first convent school candidates in Australia.³⁹ To obtain a certificate at Junior level, a pass in five subjects was required. All Hallows' had also presented girls for the Melbourne Matriculation exams.⁴⁰ The Presentation Sisters in Longreach, as we have seen, first prepared candidates for the Queensland Junior University Examination in 1911, almost immediately after the establishment of the University of Queensland.

In his history of secondary education in Queensland, Rupert Goodman noted that some religious orders 'had to adapt themselves to providing education beyond the primary level'.⁴¹ Archbishop Duhig clearly recognised the advantages of bringing the Longreach Presentation Sisters to Brisbane, given their experience in providing convent high school education. During the 1920s and 1930s he particularly invited to Brisbane those teaching institutes with experience in secondary schooling.⁴²

By 1912, convent 'high' and ladies' colleges had emerged as modern-style secondary colleges. They now differentiated between primary and secondary years to better reflect the government school

system. Less time was spent on the accomplishments and more on academic subjects, which complied with the Matriculation prerequisites of the Universities.

St Rita's College, Clayfield

Archbishop Duhig had offered the Longreach Presentation Sisters a new parish school, St Agatha's, in the northern Brisbane suburb of Clayfield. Having accepted the invitation, the Sisters came to Brisbane in 1924; not however, to Clayfield, but to Herston, where they staffed the parish school. In 1925 they were able to go to Clayfield when the school was completed as part of St Agatha's new parish centre.

Members of St Agatha's parish community keenly anticipated the arrival of the Presentation Sisters to Clayfield, not least for the enriching opportunities they would bring in the way of education, religion and cultural offerings. Although Duhig had proclaimed in early 1925 that, 'the next great work of the parish would be the building of a convent for the nuns,' by mid-1926 no such provision had been made, and it remained for the Sisters to purchase the adjacent property known as *Stanley Hall*.⁴³

When *Stanley Hall* was placed on the market in mid-1926, the Sisters believed their prayers had been answered. The hill top property on Enderley Road comprised five acres of land that commanded magnificent views of Moreton Bay and the surrounding district. *Stanley Hall* was the prestigious family residence of Florence and Edward Goddard Blume, whose grazing properties included Bexley Station outside Longreach. It is very likely that the Sisters knew the family from their years in Longreach.

Mothers Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden accepted Blume's sale price of £22,000, an enormous but realistic sum in relation to property values of that time.⁴⁴ The signatures of Alice Kennedy and Mary Madden appear on the certificate of title for *Stanley Hall*, which was signed on 25 August 1926. This document is of value for its historical interest, since women seldom entered into property transactions at that time and religious orders in Brisbane usually purchased their property through the archbishop. Furthermore, the

signed certificate of title is significant for its emblematic value in that St Rita's College was directly acquired and owned by women for the education of women. One could forgive *The Age* reporter at that time for overlooking the Sisters' independent handling of their property acquisition and for assuming that 'St Rita's was one of the finest sites that our farseeing archbishop has yet acquired for religious purposes.'⁴⁵

To obtain *Stanley Hall*, Mother Ursula approached the four Martin brothers, pastoralists in the Emerald district to act as guarantors, to which they agreed with outstanding generosity.

The Presentation Sisters at Clayfield immediately refurbished and converted *Stanley Hall* into a secondary day and boarding school for girls. They were assisted by a loyal band of supporters from St Agatha's parish and they included Parish Priest, Fr Frank O'Connell, who became a devoted friend to the Sisters.

Mothers Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden established St Rita's College in 1926. The new secondary college for girls offered both an academic pathway that fulfilled public examination requirements and a vocational program that prepared students for the commercial world. The latter included subjects such as Commercial Art, Typing and Shorthand.⁴⁶ In addition, there were the familiar cultural offerings, which many parents continued to regard as essential to girls' schooling, such as Art and Music. The resultant curriculum was broad and catered for diverse student needs. Domestic Science, however, which was offered to girls in government high schools, was not included at St Rita's at that time, no doubt due to the facilities required and the additional financial strain it would have placed on the Sisters.

When St Rita's was first registered as an approved secondary school in 1927, it was advertised in *The Catholic Advocate* as a 'Superior Boarding and High School for Girls conducted by the Presentation Sisters'. A prominent photograph of *Stanley Hall* displayed its stately splendour and historic connections with refined society. The advertisement assured prospective parents that St Rita's had retained

its links with the European tradition of convent education, while innovative subjects such as physical education were also offered:

This school is built on one of the beautiful hills in Clayfield in an exceptionally healthy situation. The spacious grounds are well laid out and contain tennis and basketball courts for both Boarding and Day pupils. The ordinary school curriculum includes all the branches of a superior English education as well as the French and Latin languages, freehand and pastel drawing, Plain and artistic needlework, Class singing and Callisthenics. Pupils are prepared for the University, Commercial, Music and Elocution Examinations.⁴⁷

French was traditionally an 'extra' in school syllabi but was included in the ordinary curriculum of St Rita's. Additionally, St Rita's offered Latin, a subject historically associated with the classical curriculum in boys' schooling. Needlework both 'plain and artistic' continued to be regarded as useful and important for girls. Christian Doctrine was taught according to diocesan guidelines regarding content and was examined by the Diocesan Inspector of Schools. Other 'special' subjects, for which an additional tuition fee was paid included piano, violin and elocution.

Over the years, the high standards attained at St Rita's and other Presentation Colleges in Queensland bear testimony to the Sisters' academic and feminist tradition, which dates back to Jeanne de Lestonnac's educational goal of achieving for girls what the Jesuits in France were providing for boys.

Conclusion

Between 1900 and 1960, Alice Kennedy and Mary Madden emerged as significant educational leaders in Queensland. For almost fifty years between 1912 and 1960, the leadership of the Queensland Congregation of Presentation Sisters alternated between them. From 1900, they established eight primary schools in the Rockhampton diocese; one in Toowoomba and thirteen primary schools in Brisbane. They also founded four secondary colleges in Queensland: Our Lady's College, Longreach in 1902, St Ursula's College, Yeppoon in 1917, St Rita's College, Brisbane in 1926 and Rosary College at Murgon in 1942. They purchased property on behalf of their congregation and built institutions from the ground up. The

clergy and lay community, with whom the Sisters formed valuable partnerships, experienced them as well-educated, cultured, self-determined, enterprising women, who were effective teachers and highly competent administrators.

The Presentation Sisters established in their Queensland schools the distinctive tradition of convent education, which placed equal accent on the social, vocational and intellectual formation of women. At a glance, this tradition dispels the idea that convent 'high' schools were singularly concerned with training young girls in the accomplishments, to the detriment of a useful, balanced and academic curriculum.

Though often hidden in the public records of the time, these 'quiet' women must be allowed to surface as significant participants and effective leaders in Queensland's educational history; not least for their pioneering role in the provision of secondary education in regional Queensland.

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*Her thesis examines the history of convent education in Europe
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such as the Presentation Sisters,
have made to the development of education in Queensland.*

*Her book, 'Acorn to Oak', which was recently published,
is a history of St Rita's College, Clayfield.*

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Anna Barbaro, 'Recovering the Origins of Convent Education in Australia', *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 24 (2003):45-56.
- 2 Francoise Soury-Lavergne in her doctoral study provides valuable detail on Jeanne's institute of the Company of Mary Our Lady and the convent school in Bordeaux. F.Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway in Education: Jeanne de Lestonnac, 1556-1640*. Translated from the French by M.Eusebio and R.Wheeler (Rome, 1984).
- 3 M.A.Jégou, *The Ursulines of the Faubourg St Jacques in Paris 1607-1662: Origin of an Apostolic Monastery*, (Paris: Presses Universities de France, 1981). From the Foreword by Jean Orcibal.
- 4 M.R. MacGinley, *Roads to Sion* (Brisbane: Boolarong Publications, 1983), 73.
- 5 Ronald Fogarty, *Catholic Education in Australia, 1806-1950*, vol. 2, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 1959) 377.
- 6 Fogarty, 377.
- 7 B.T. Dowd & S.E. Tearle, *Centenary: Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, 1874-1974)*, (Sydney, 1973),47.
- 8 Rosa MacGinley, *A Place of Springs, The Story of the Queensland Presentation Sisters, 1900-1960* (Brisbane: Leader Press, 1977).
- 9 Fogarty, 377.
- 10 The Holy Cross High School in Daylesford, school advertisement in *The Advocate*, Melbourne, 1892.
- 11 The Holy Cross High School in Daylesford.
- 12 M.R. MacGinley, *Roads to Sion*, 318.
- 13 Maurice O'Connor, *Never a Dull Moment* (Brookvale: Augustinian Press, 1997), 11.
- 14 M. Raphael Consedine, *Listening Journey* (Melbourne: Dove Publications, 1983), 287.
- 15 Stephanie Burley, *None More Anonymous?: Catholic Teaching Nuns, Their Secondary Schools and Students in South Australia 1880-1925. Thesis (M.Ed) (University of Adelaide, 1992, 23.*
- 16 M. O'Donoghue, *Mother Vincent Whitty*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1972), 60.

The development of denominational colleges and grammar schools for girls is traced in Marjorie Theobald's book, *Knowing Women: Origins of women's education in nineteenth-century Australia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

- 17 Fogarty, 348.
- 18 Mother House Annals, Vol.1, written by Sr Evangelist Murtagh, 35.
- 19 Clayfield Convent Annals, 12.
- 20 Dean McElhinney's account of the sisters' reception cited in *The Longreach Leader* (Golden Jubilee Issue, 17 March, 1950).
- 21 Files from the *Western Champion* cited in *The Longreach Leader*, 17 March 1950.
- 22 Annals of the Presentation Congregation, Queensland, Vol.I, 33.
- 23 *The Longreach Leader*, 17 March 1950.
- 24 See Fogarty, 286. Compare R. Goodman, *Secondary Education in Queensland, 1860 -1960*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968), 292.
- 25 The principle of adaptation is from Angela Merici's writings in 'Testament', 1545, Sr Ursula Clarke, *The Ursulines in Cork: 1771-1996*, The Ursuline Convent, (Cork, 1996),190.
- 26 Mother House Annals, Vol 1, 35.
- 27 Clayfield Convent Archives, Exercise Book of Notes written by Sr Evangelist Murtagh, 43.
- 28 Clayfield Convent Annals, Letters Series 20/ typescript of an interview of Archbishop Young, 1974.
- 29 Recollections of Archbishop Duhig on the occasion of Mother Patrick's Golden Jubilee, 8 January 1946', cited in MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 88.
- 30 See for example, Fogarty, 297-98.
- 31 Clayfield Convent Annals, Book II, 42.
- 32 Clayfield Convent Archives, Exercise Book, 20.
- 33 MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 106.
- 34 *Daily Record*, Rockhampton, 22 January 1917.

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- 35 James Duhig, jottings in an autograph book dated 31 August 1914, presented to Sr Michael McMahon, cited in MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 154.
- 36 St Agatha's was built as a Mass centre for the people of the Woolloowin parish who had to travel to the Hamilton and Nundah parishes for weekly Mass. Duhig had chosen the name 'St Agatha's' after the patron saint of the sixth century church of the Irish College in Rome, where he studied as a seminarian. Sr Evangelist Murtagh, *Clayfield Convent Annals*, 2.
- 37 Rosa MacGinley provides a comprehensive study of these institutes in *A Dynamic Of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia*, 2nd ed., (Sydney: Crossing Press, 2002).
- 38 See the reference to All Hallows' School, Brisbane, in the 'Report of University of Sydney, 1879 12-13, P.P. (NSW), 1879-80, 463 cited in Fogarty, 380.
- 39 Fogarty, 380.
- 40 Advertisement in *The Age*, Brisbane 16 December 1899, p.24 cited in Fogarty, 380.
- 41 Goodman, 293.
- 42 Goodman, 293.
- 43 *The Catholic Advocate*, 9 April 1925.
- 44 To gain an idea of comparative monetary values at that time, the concept of the Australian Basic Wage, which was calculated to support a family composed of husband, wife and three children is useful. In 1921, the Commonwealth basic weekly wage was £4.2s, which amounted to approximately \$200 per year.
- 45 *The Age*, 6 November 1926, 10.
- 46 *Clayfield Convent Annals*, Book II, 30.
- 47 *The Catholic Advocate*, 4 August 1927, 8.