

GROWING UP IN CORNELIA'S SCHOOL: ST. LEONARD'S ACADEMY, PHILADELPHIA

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GROWING UP IN CORNELIA'S SCHOOL: ST. LEONARD'S ACADEMY, PHILADELPHIA

Rodger Van Allen

In the summer of 1843, Cornelia Peacock Connelly (1809-1879), her husband Pierce, and their two youngest surviving children, Adeline age 7, and Frank, age 2, sailed for England where their oldest child, Mercer, 11, attended school. Cornelia could not have anticipated, however, that it would be 1867 before she returned to the United States. Her one and only return to these shores (and a brief return it was) came when Mother Connelly, S.H.C.J. sailed from England for New York on October 12 and left New York to return on November 27.¹

During this visit, Cornelia purchased the future St. Leonard's Academy. The welfare of her Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in their American mission, begun in 1862, was always in Cornelia's thoughts, as was a longing for her native country. Even the convent cows at St. Leonard's in England had names such as "America" and "Towanda."² The latter was the place in Pennsylvania where the S.H.C.J.s began their mission in the United States. In 1846, in deference to the wishes of Pope Gregory XVI, the community and the work of the S.H.C.J. were launched in England. When Cornelia shared with the pope her aspirations for an American apostolate for the community, he said, "From England, let your work of Catholic education spread to America." This path of development was followed. By 1867, however, the expanding American mission faced a crisis, and Cornelia's presence was required. Biographer Radegunde Flaxman states simply: "A property crisis in Philadelphia had arisen."³ *The Annals of the S.H.C.J. - American Province 1862-1882* record a "serious misunderstanding" with Father Charles Carter, Vicar-General of the Philadelphia diocese, who was considered a respected friend and supporter of the community. The exact nature of this disagreement was never recorded, but it was serious enough that Cornelia herself came. The problem seems to have been that the deed to the Sharon property had not yet been transferred to the Society as promised and thus it was still only rented. This meant the Society had no property in its own name, and for Cornelia this meant that the Society's American mission

¹Radegunde Flaxman, *A Woman Styled Bold: The Life of Cornelia Connelly 1809-1879* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1991) for the most recent and comprehensive biography.

²Ibid., p.264.

³Ibid.

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was left in an insecure and vulnerable position. Her solution was the quick purchase of two houses still under construction on Chestnut Street in West Philadelphia. Before the end of November, 1867 Father Carter, alarmed lest the Sisters abandon Sharon, sent the deed to the property to Mother Mary Xavier Nobel, leader of the S.H.C.J. American mission.⁴ During Cornelia's Philadelphia visit, both her relatives and the Connellys visited her, she had twice visited her sister Mother Mary Peacock, R.S.C.J., and she took back with her on the ship her brother Ralph's two daughters, Nelie and Bella, to finish their schooling at St. Leonard's in England. Cornelia left secure in the knowledge that the property crisis had been resolved and that all was well with Society in America.⁵

The two large brownstone houses purchased by Cornelia for \$13,000 were located at 3831-33 Chestnut Street, a desirable residential location within the city limits, but with a fresh, country atmosphere. She gave the school the name St. Leonard's, the same name as one of the Sisters' first schools, located at St. Leonard's - on - Sea in Sussex, England. Before returning to England, Cornelia appointed Mother Mary Xavier as superior of St. Leonard's convent and Vicaress of the American mission. Mother Mary Walburga was appointed superior at the Sharon Hill convent and school where the sisters had been present since 1864, and Mother Mary Agnes was made superior at the Spring Garden Street Assumption parish and school where the sisters had served since 1863. The motherhouse was St. Leonard's.

On January 20, 1868, after delays in the completion of the construction of the buildings, the Society took possession of the new property. St. Leonard's was launched with wonderful support from both Sharon and Spring Garden Street. More than one-half of the Sharon students transferred to St. Leonard's to be nearer their homes. Sharon also sent two vans filled with house furnishings and produce. One of the girls at Sharon donated the china for the children's refectory, and the students of both Sharon and Spring Garden Street Academies collected among themselves \$110 for the altar plate.⁶

St. Leonard's was located within the growing parish of St. James at 38th and Chestnut Streets. The parish, consecrated by Bishop John Neuman in 1852, did not have its own school until 1870. St. Leonard's Academy had

⁴*Annals of the S.H.C.J. - American Province 1862-1882*, Mother Mary Mildred, S.H.C.J. pp.67-78.

⁵Flaxman, *A Woman Styled Bold*, p.265.

⁶*Annals of the S.H.C.J*, Mother Mary Mildred, p. 70.

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forty students by the end of its first partial year of 1868 and flourished thereafter within its tuition paying academy model. Early records of just what the tuition charge was are difficult to find, but in 1905 the day school tuition was fifty dollars per year. In that same year, the Society acquired the adjoining property at 3825-27 Chestnut Street for \$45,000, and in 1926 another adjoining property at 19 South 39th Street was purchased for \$50,000. In 1924, a well designed major addition including a gymnasium, lunchroom, and large rooftop fenced play area was built.⁷



View of St. Leonard's Academy from Chestnut Street with 39th Street on the left. Cornelia Connelly purchased the house in the right foreground.

The Boys' School, 1926-1975

The purchase of the house at 19 South 39th Street in 1926 led to the development of a boys' school for grades five through eight at St. Leonard's. Boys and girls were taught in the same classrooms for grades one through four. Girls continued their separate education from grades five through twelve.

⁷The only subsequent addition was 3821 Chestnut Street, purchased on December 5, 1945 for \$10,000.

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The entry in the *School Journal* for June 30, 1926 states: "Kelly's house taken over for use of the Boys' School." By September, preparations were complete and the launch of the school year in the new facility went very smoothly. A *Journal* remark on September 20 indicated that the new building for the boys had proven "very adaptable for school purposes." By November 18, the *Journal* reports that the boys were very anxious for a playground adjoining their new building. The recent purchase of the building, however, made any further direct expense "out of the question" at that time, and so Mother Mary Josefa, who headed the Boys' School, arranged for a fund raising fair that included the selling of chances; and a new concrete recreation area, complete with a basketball court was soon in place and was "well used."⁸



*The Kelly's House at 19 South 39th Street,
Home of the Boys' School. Play area is
behind the fence on the left.*

Mother Mary Josefa's sensitive and creative leadership in dealing with the playground issue was indicative of the style of leadership that was present throughout the years of the existence of the Boys' School. We cannot, of course, report on all these years in any depth, and so our discussion

⁸*School Journal, St. Leonard's 1922-24* (which actually includes entries up to 1929), in Box A of the St. Leonard's materials, Archives of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus (ASHCJ), Midhill, Rosemont PA.

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will focus on the tenure of Mother Mary Alban (Sr. Frances Heron), Head of the Boys' School from 1936-1955, longer than anyone else.⁹

Mother Mary Alban was just twenty-eight years of age when she was assigned to the Boys' School in 1936. She had grown up in a large Catholic family in nearby St. Agatha's parish in West Philadelphia, and had first met sisters of the Society during her grammar school years. She entered the S.H.C.J. in 1927, professed her first vows in 1930, and taught girls at St. Leonard's for three years. She then taught at St. Walburga's in New York for two years, made final vows, taught for a year at Summit, New Jersey, and in 1936 arrived for what would be her assignment for the next nineteen years. She was slender, quick of step, with alert blue eyes, and the fair complexioned reddish face of her Irish-born parents. She stood about five feet, four inches, but as my brother Jack, her former student, said with surprise when he saw her stature at the 1980 reunion, "I thought you were six feet tall."

⁹This will also enable me to write in part out of my own experience as a student at St. Leonard's from 1943-1951. My connections with the Society of the Holy Child Jesus are in fact multiple. Regina Maynes, daughter and beloved child of my maternal great grandfather, Rodger Maynes entered the S.H.C.J. at age 20 in 1897. Her father, a cattle drover who went into the meat business and prospered, implored her to leave the convent and return home, once even appearing at the Sharon convent with a horse and carriage to take her away. As Mother Mary Etheldreda, she died in 1960. My father, John F. Van Allen, came to Philadelphia from Troy NY in 1922, having saved enough money from work in a shirt factory to enter the University of Pennsylvania at age 21. When his money ran out, he switched to the part-time division, and after hearing the announcement at mass of an available position in the Boys' School, served as eighth grade teacher in the new Boys' School, 1926-29. My mother, Helen McAnany graduated from St. Leonard's in 1929, her brother John in 1931, my brother Jack, in 1947. My wife, Judy McGrath Van Allen, attended St. Leonard's from 1947-54, and graduated from Rosemont College in 1963. I have been an active member of the St. Leonard's Boys' Alumni since its inception, and completed a three year term as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Drexel Hill School of the Holy Child in 1996.

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Sister Francis Heron, S.H.C.J. (Mother Mary Alban) shown in center of 1980 photo. Rev. Robert Currie, S.J., St. Leonard's 1954 graduate on right; visitor from India on left.

In 1936 the Boys' School had a total enrollment of thirty-one students in three groups: a combined fourth and fifth grade with Mother Anna Maria; sixth grade with Mother Mary Theophila; and seventh and eighth grade with Mother Mary Alban. Mr. Jack Fitzmaier served as gym teacher and coach. The *School Journal* reports that during that fall there was "some football practice, but very little as Mr. F. thinks it dangerous for younger children." They did play three games that year, defeating Drexel 46-27, losing to Notre Dame 6-0, and losing to St. Anthony's 19-13. St. Leonard's Boys was always a small school--the total enrollment in four grades was rarely above fifty--and after 1936 football was discontinued "to the great disappointment of the boys, but to the relief of Mr. F. and the nuns."¹⁰ Basketball became the pre-eminent sport for the school. The school's main focus, however, was academic and regularly produced scholarship winners in competitive examinations at schools such as the Jesuits' St. Joseph's Prep.

Students were expected to arrive at school by 8:20 a.m. for a formal beginning of the day at 8:30. There was no bus service for the Boys' School since it was assumed that by age nine or ten public transit could be used. In fact, most youngsters had begun well before that, as young as second grade.

¹⁰*School Journal Boys' School, 1933-34* (which includes entries up to 1937), Box A, ASHCJ.

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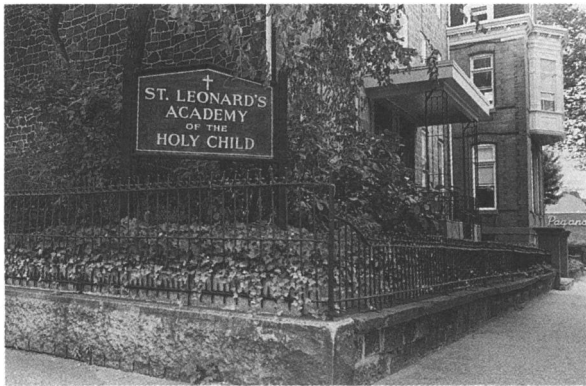
to navigate the subway, elevated, bus, or trolley service, including "transfers," and thought nothing of it, a fact that today seems almost as remarkable as having a school with four grades that had a total of only thirty or forty students. Many students arrived well before the 8:20 norm to play in the schoolyard "before school." At 8:30 students in each class rose from their seats, placed their hand on their heart, and recited the Pledge of Allegiance, into which I seem to recall had been inserted the phrase "under God," something that was officially done later under President Dwight Eisenhower in 1954. This was followed by a brief group recitation of prayer, which included a "Morning Offering"--O my God, I offer all my prayers, works, and actions of this day to you. Grant, I beseech you that whatever I do this day may be acceptable and pleasing in your sight." I recall being introduced to this prayer in 1945, in the second half of second grade, by Mother Mary Constantia, (Sister Dorothy Cropper). She said, "Children, what would you say if I said I could teach you a prayer that would let you turn everything you do into a prayer?" She had our attention, and obviously made a point that has not been lost. Once learned, the "Morning Offering" became part of the daily routine at St. Leonard's. Much later I can look back and see in this what would be called in religious or theological terms a "world affirming spirituality," one that saw all of life as possessing religious meaning. Again, with later language, I can see that it was resistant to any sense of dualism, that dividing up of life into "the sacred" and "the Secular" in a way that can distort authentic religion into "a thing," easily separated and lacking impact on one's regular or "real" life and activity. For Cornelia Connelly, action and contemplation came together in a literally grace-full active mysticism. The title of the late Sister Caritas McCarthy's book, *The Spirituality of Cornelia Connelly: In God, for God, with God* conveys this. The "Morning Offering" was fundamental in this approach, and part of the tradition and spirituality of the sisters and their students.¹¹

After the pledge and prayer, the academic work began. At the top of the page, on any writing which was done, the letters A.M.D.G. were written, standing for Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam (To the Greater Glory of God). This expression summarized a major element of the tradition and distinctiveness of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. More loosely translated, it holds that whatever one does in life should be done with the fullest energy, creativity, and possibility. Cornelia Connelly was partly drawn to Catholicism

¹¹See, for example, *God Alone: an Anthology of the Spiritual Writings of Cornelia Connelly* (Springfield IL: Templegate, 1960), p.49.

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through her encounters with this Jesuit tradition; she had deep respect for it, and insisted in 1846, in her dealings with England's Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman, that the spirit of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus should be formed in this tradition.¹² The meaning of A.M.D.G. at the top of each page of written work was well understood, and was an operatively present philosophy, however mechanical in some measure the inscription became.



A view of St. Leonard's from corner of 39th and Chestnut, looking down Chestnut, c. 1981.

A typical morning's academic work might consist of math from slender textbooks with virtually no pictures but an almost endless sequence of "word problems"--"if John can buy six oranges for twenty-four cents, how much will nine oranges cost?" English featured extensive grammatical training, especially through the diagramming of sentences. Avoiding inkblots while drawing with ruler and ink pen the almost architectural framework for compound sentences was quite a challenge.

A mid-morning recreation period usually involved a "boxball" game. This was baseball adapted to the realities of a concrete playground that was perhaps fifty feet wide and one hundred feet long. First base was one of the supports on the wooden fence on the Ludlow St. Side; second base was one of the metal poles for the basketball goal; third base was a downspout on the

¹²"Wiseman wrote the Jesuit provincial:" It is particularly desired [by Cornelia] that for some time at least, the spirit of the order should be formed under the Society of Jesus... the fate of the Establishment seems almost to depend on this concession." As quoted in Flaxman, *A Woman Styled Bold*, p.112.

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school building. The pitcher delivered a spongeball or tennisball underhanded on one bounce to the batter who swung at it with a clenched fist. It was not too difficult to hit the ball over the centerfield fence which was about ten feet behind second base. But in addition to not presenting much of a challenge, this put the ball into 39th Street and slowed up the game, so it was an automatic out. You could get a home run by hitting a ball "out of the park," but only if you angled the hit down the left field line in such a way that the ball hit first against the brownstone school building at the second floor level and then bounded from there on over the "centerfield" fence. Basketball and touch-football were also enjoyed at times in the schoolyard, but "boxball" is the schoolyard recreation activity that most will recall.

Mid-morning recess was followed by more academic work. Religion included bible history and catechism. The latter, in *Baltimore Catechism* question and answer format, was memorized and reviewed, but also made intelligible.

The Boys' School was the first scheduled lunch group at 11:30 a.m. This was followed by a visit to the chapel for some familiar prayers. We were also introduced to the psalms. A hymn was always sung. Mother Alban played the organ and she had a good sense for hymns that produced enthusiastic singing. At the 1980 Golden Jubilee of her religious profession, the congregation sang "A Mighty Fortress Is our God, a Bulwark never Failing." This famous hymn by Martin Luther was not in the pre-Vatican II, pre-ecumenism hymnbooks of St. Leonard's, but that was the kind of vigorous hymn that was part of the daily chapel visit. After lunch and chapel came the longest recreation period of the day. At its close, the whole student body gathered in Mother Alban's eighth-grade classroom, the eighth graders in their desks, the rest standing around the walls. This was a time for announcements, reports of games or activities, and plans for trips. We visited, mostly on foot, events and sites all over Philadelphia. It was also a time for corrections and exhortations for the whole group. A favorite theme was the appreciation of one's parents and the responsibilities that came with their generous bestowal of an education at St. Leonard's Academy. "Your parents could have placed you in a public school or in your local Catholic parish school and these would have been satisfactory and good things to do, but in fact they have loved and cared about you so much that they have paid

to give you the special attention and benefits of a St. Leonard's education.¹³ You have been given much, and your lives should be lived, now and in the future, in ways that show an appreciation and living out of this." Most students thought about this and did feel special.

Self-control was also a familiar theme. Successful living, Christian living, demanded the ability to control oneself. Part of the challenge of life was the development of this self-mastery. Sometimes this meant not doing something. Sometimes it meant motivating ourselves to action. God was there to help us. Prayer was necessary. I think most students found this a meditation on what would later be called "empowerment."

Another theme was one's conduct or deportment when traveling on public transit. You were not to sit while adults, male or female, were standing, and that was the case whether their skin was black or white, a point that was made repeatedly. And one should not look for accolades for this - simply get out of your seat and get out of the way. These and other such remarks were delivered with a verve, wit, vigor, and drama by Mother Alban that held us spellbound.¹⁴ On the chalkboard behind Mother Alban's chair was the neatly hand-painted inscription in Latin, "Facto non verbo," the motto of the S.H.C.J., "Actions not words."¹⁵ In this, and in the emphasis on God's gifts and our response, the spirit and charism of Cornelia Connelly was present in these sessions.

The first afternoon academic session was a quiet reading time. Everyone had to have a book from the first floor school library for this time, a relaxing period that fostered pleasure in reading. There was no effort to

¹³As mentioned above, data regarding tuition has not been preserved in the Archives. My mother has recalled that tuition during the years my brother and I attended (1939-1951) evolved from about \$100 per year to about \$200 per year.

¹⁴One day Mother Alban's commanding presence was training the whole Boys' School for an upcoming liturgical event in the chapel, orchestrating a procession of students, the student organist, the student playing the priest's role, etc. At a suitable brief pause in all the drama being directed so compellingly by Mother Alban, Miss Dorothy Flynn, a lay teacher, kneeling in the rear of the chapel, gestured for a word with Mother Alban, and with admiration said privately to her: "Sarah Bernhardt will never be dead as long as you're alive!" Interview with Sr. Francis Heron, by the author, Rosemont PA, June 21, 1996. Tape now in ASHCJ.

¹⁵Cf. Caritas McCarthy, S.H.C.J. *The Spirituality of Cornelia Connelly: In God, for God, with God* (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986) p.207.

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force heavy reading. The library was filled, however, with readable and worthwhile books well suited to us. The books of John R. Tunis were special favorites that were passed with positive recommendations from student to student. They all had a sports' context, but also contained a human and social conflict. It was Tunis's *A City for Lincoln* that first made me think about civil rights' questions.



L. to R.: Mag Westhead, Frannie Gill and Mary Jo Ritchie in 1949 production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

Art and music were typically scheduled for the last periods, but they were clearly a serious feature of an S.H.C.J. education. Cornelia Connelly herself drew and painted, and later organized what she called Holy Child Theater, a theater workshop and performance.¹⁶ Some kind of simple drama, music, or recitation was a part of the weekly (every Monday) distribution of mini-academic reports called cachets. For these sessions, the whole Boys' School gathered, and wore required dark blue suits for the occasion, as the Reverend Mother Superior of the St. Leonard's community distributed these cachets individually. These contained three summary grades: for conduct, for application, and for general average.

The basketball coach during most of the years of Mother Alban's leadership was Joe Walters, a young Villanova graduate and basketball player

¹⁶Cf. Flaxman, *A Woman Styled Bold*, p.245. "It is when we look at what Mother Connelly believed about art itself that we begin to see that the emphasis on these allied subjects had for her an overall significance. She was doing much more than occupying the children with play-acting or meeting parental demand for accomplishments. She was seeking to imprint wonder and reverence and love of the unseen God, and believed the fine arts were a specially suitable tool for this purpose."

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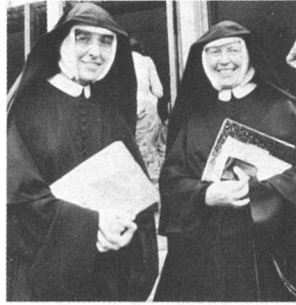
who succeeded his brother Bob, a LaSalle University graduate and player. Bob and Joe Walters have now been an important presence and part of basketball in Philadelphia for more than fifty years. Joe Walters was never called "Mr. Walters" in his years as the St. Leonard's coach; he was simply "Joe," but he was a natural disciplinarian and teacher who knew and respected the game of basketball and the young people with whom he worked. Both Mother Alban and Joe Walters brought the A.M.D.G. spirit to basketball at St. Leonard's. There was already an established record of achievement in basketball for this remarkably small school, but Joe Walters brought years of particular distinction to it. Featuring ball control, a tenacious defense, good foul shooting, and a disciplined pattern offense, the team racked up victory after victory against teams whose school enrollments were sometimes ten times or more the size of St. Leonard's.



The 1946-47 basketball team; l to r: Joe Heck, Jack Linehan, John Currie, David McFillin, Ed Voelker, Don Colby, Peter Hughes, Ed Duffy.

For most students, the school day did not end at 3:00 p.m. Many students stayed after dismissal and played boxball or other games in the schoolyard, worked producing the school paper, or practiced for plays. By 4:30 p.m. you were expected to leave for home. Sometimes students came on Saturdays or Sundays to play in the gym, and some came to serve mass and benediction in the convent on Sundays, in the same chapel where most had made their First Communion in the second grade, and later participated in an annual religious retreat.

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Mother Mary Celestine (Sr. Helen Doherty), S.H.C.J., right, was principal of St. Leonard's from 1946 to 1967. Left, Mother Mary Peter (Sr. Mary Peter Froelicher), S.H.C.J.

Under Mother Alban and others who led and served in the S.H.C.J. spirit of Cornelia Connelly, St. Leonard's, and its Boys' School, was a warm and welcoming place where students wanted to be. In fact, through the years, successive generations of many families enrolled, and names like Mundy, Currie, Bryan, Toner and others were repeated. In 1981, when St. Leonard's closed completely, one student's wistful, rhetorical question to a reporter was: "I don't know if you or anyone else could understand a school where the punishment was [that] students were forbidden to stay after school."¹⁷ That was the same as my experience of St. Leonard's. Cornelia Connelly said, "Trust the children and never let your confidence in them be easily shaken. Confidence beget confidence."¹⁸ She was right.



Boys' School Reunion, 1980; From left: Owen Goodwin, Austin McGuire, and John Robrecht.

¹⁷Mary Elizabeth Powers, '38 to Ron Goldwyn, "Nuns Break the News, Tears Flow: St. Leonard's Closing," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, January 22, 1981.

¹⁸The statement is quoted in the 1996 *Goals for Schools of the Holy Child Jesus* and has been, and continues to be a very fundamental tenet in ten continuing schools in the network of Holy Child Schools.

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Later History

The decision to phase out the Boys' School was made in 1970. The school was flourishing in every respect and had even, in the basketball tradition noted above, won the Catholic Academy League championship that year. The decision to close the Boys' School was a consequence of a decision to focus the educational apostolate of St. Leonard's on the education of young women from grades seven through twelve. The *School Journal* states: "Crowded quarters in the plant in sharing facilities, shortage of personnel in the Society, and the inability to continue all our works contributed to the decision to phase out."¹⁹

In 1980, Sr. Frances Heron (Mother Alban) celebrated the Golden Jubilee of her religious profession within the Society, and the event was combined with a reunion of the Boys' School. Sr. Frances had been transferred from St. Leonard's in 1955. More than two hundred people, however, gathered for this special Eucharistic celebration in St. Agatha-St. James Church. Sister Alma Cornely (Mother Mary Stephanie), who had worked with Sr. Frances in the Boys' School and later spent many years serving in Africa, delivered the first scriptural reading. St. Leonard's Principal, Sister Tobie Tondi, led the prayers of the faithful. St. Leonard's graduates filled all other roles. Concelebrants were Robert and Charles Currie, both Jesuits. James Toner was a reader. The offertory procession consisted of Sr. Frances herself, Salome Bryan, a mother of six St. Leonard's graduates including Sister Mary Leo Bryan S.H.C.J, Peter Hughes, and Richard Currie. The *School Journal* reports that after mass all gathered in the St. Leonard's gym for "refreshments provided and served by Duffy Brothers, famous caterers. All the boys of this family attended St. Leonard's."²⁰

¹⁹*St. Leonard's 1962-1975*, Box A, ASHCJ, on a loose sheet yearly summary 6/1/70-5/31/71.

²⁰*Ibid.*, March 30, 1980. The Duffy girls also attended St. Leonard's.

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Sister Annellen Moore, S.H.C.J., member of St. Leonard's class of 1966, and later a chemistry teacher and dance instructor at the school, leads students in song in the chapel.

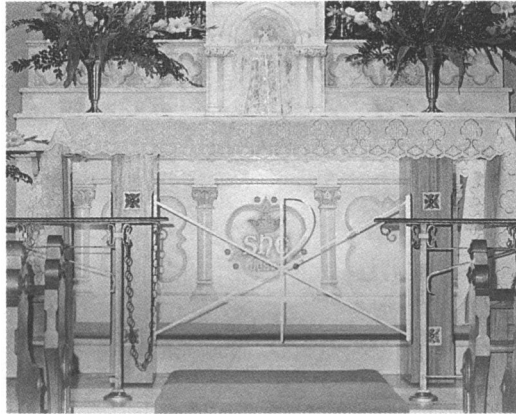
In the late 1980s, under the leadership of John Currie, a 1943 graduate, a St. Leonard's Boys' Alumni was formed. It continues now with Joseph Casey, a 1951 graduate, serving as President. In recent years, the group has met for communion breakfasts, sometimes jointly with the St. Leonard's Alumnae, and has presented its Spirit of St. Leonard's - Sister Frances Heron Award to: contractor Daniel Keating, Jr., class of 1933; Joe Walters; and James P. Considine, class of 1929. Considine's award was granted posthumously and accepted by his sister Betty. He was an early World War II casualty who was killed while serving as a volunteer with the British Royal Air Force.

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 SCHOOL & CHAPEL OF ST. LEONARD'S ACADEMY
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 Oak Pipe Organ, ornate golden Oak Pewes & many other
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 Card Catalogue Desks, Chairs, Tables, Banquet Desks,
 BRASS candlesticks, some nice Crystal & Silverplate, \$2
 Pk. Jodie CHINA service, MODERN CHOCOL. Desks,
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*Philadelphia Inquirer advertisement
 of June 27, 1981 auction.*

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St. Leonard's Academy further evolved from serving young women in grades seven to twelve to simply focusing on grades nine to twelve. Throughout the 1970s, it operated at full capacity, but as the number of sisters declined and other costs increased full capacity was not enough. To be financially viable, enrollment had to increase by about one hundred students. The *Community Journal* reported that "that would not be difficult" -- it was the only private Catholic girls' high school serving the south, central, and western parts of Philadelphia, and included a thirty percent minority enrollment among its two hundred sixty students. The problem was not getting more students; the problem was adapting the plant to accommodate them. Lodged in those homes purchased in 1867 by Cornelia Connelly, the school was not able to meet the fire and safety requirements for the larger school community. Alternative sites in the area were pursued, as was the possibility of completely rebuilding on the old site. When none of these options proved practical, the decision to close was made. The *Community Journal* records: "We realized that we would be the last community at St. Leonard's, - 114 years of S.H.C.J. residence here would end in the summer of 1981."²¹



St. Leonard's Chapel with the seal of the Society in the front of the altar; now found in the Main Building at New Sharon, Rosemont.

²¹Ibid. September, 1981

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On June 27, an absolute auction of the contents of the school and chapel took place with two hundred people in attendance. While the ad for the auction indicates the sale of "Marble altars," it was really the remaining marble pieces that were sold after the consecrated altar stone had been removed. Daniel Keating III, himself a graduate of the Rosemont (PA) School of the Holy Child, purchased the St. Leonard's Academy buildings that had been occupied by earlier generations of his family. He then extensively redesigned and renovated the plant into the St. Leonard's Court office complex which is found there today. He took the marble seal of the Society, which had been the front part of the altar in the chapel, had it made into a table, and presented it to the Society. The table resided in the front parlor of the Main Building of the New Sharon (Rosemont) complex. More recently the marble slab with the seal was removed from the table and inserted into the wall of the dining room of the same building, where the sisters have a more regular occasion to see it, as do the past graduates, members of the faculty, and others, who recall St. Leonard's Academy with warmth and affection. For myself and others who grew up in "Cornelia's school," the St. Leonard's experience was a privilege. Thank you.

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