

# CENTENNIAL GAZETTE

St. James Cathedral, Seattle

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## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

In 1911, five Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary—Sisters Mary Everildis, Mary Flora, Mary Rosella, Mary Roswitha, and Mary Cyril—established the Cathedral School. It was a free school, open to both Catholics and non-Catholics; many of the children were from poor working families. For the first eight months, the Sisters worked out of four spare classrooms in St. Rose's Academy on Broadway, while their new building was under construction.

Just after Easter, 1912, they moved into a brand-new, spacious and state-of-the-art facility at the corner of Columbia and Terry. The four-story building featured a covered gymnasium and playground (on the roof), a large hall with a stage, and two floors of classrooms. The Sisters were astonished the following September when enrollment jumped from 100 to 256, and, two years later, to more than 300. In their brand-new school building, finding space for all the children was already a problem!

A typical day at Cathedral School began with Mass in the Cathedral. Those lucky enough to live close by might dash home for a quick cup of cocoa before school began. Then the children would line up in the street for the daily procession into school, which usually happened to the accompaniment of recorded band music. In the classroom, the day began with the "Morning Offering" followed by the Pledge of Allegiance, and the first part of the day was devoted to recitations of learned material. Memorization was the basis of education in those days, and the children of the Cathedral School learned a great deal of poetry by heart, including passages from Longfellow's *Evangeline*. Lessons followed: math, civics, handwriting (following the Wesco system), religion, history, and "manual training" for boys and "domestic science" for girls; there were even classes in folk-dancing!

Many of the sisters were gifted musicians, and music was an important part of a Cathedral School education. The children—both boys and girls—sang frequently at Cathedral liturgies, including the weekly "children's Mass" at 9:00am on Sundays. They sang for funeral Masses, and every year they sang carols around the Christmas crib.

The Sisters who taught in the Cathedral School were very busy indeed. One teacher was responsible for as many as 60 children. And the work of the school did not end at 3:30. Children who were newly arrived in the



Second graders, 1946-1947.

United States—and there were many of them—came to the Convent after school for special tutoring in English. The Sisters would visit children who were in the hospital, bringing them prayers, news from school, and homework as well. They kept careful track of "their" families, helping an overworked young mother clean a new apartment, providing special opportunities for poor children, and the like. In addition, the Sisters were responsible for maintaining their own residence, and they also devoted several hours each day to prayer.

In its seventy-year history, the Cathedral School educated thousands of young people, both boys and girls. The Sisters of the Holy Names reached out to an incredibly diverse student body—Filipino, Japanese, African-America, Italian, German—and instilled in each student faith, pride, and a strong sense of community. "I treasure my truly liberal education at Cathedral and Holy Names Academy, and cherish the awareness it imparted that whatever direction I might

take, religion was important," writes Elizabeth Erickson, who attended the Cathedral School in 1947. Hannah Hirabayashi agrees: "The school was special because of the Sisters who taught not only academics, but also taught us respect for and acceptance of each other. I like to think we were one big family."

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Seattle, like so many other urban centers, was decimated by the growth of the suburbs. Just ten years after the triumphant celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Cathedral School in 1962, the School was forced to close. Never again would the halls of the old school ring to the well-remembered words....

Hail to our dear School, the School we love so well.  
Hail to its dear halls where knowledge e'er doth dwell.  
With joy and gladness we sing in happy strain,  
Call on our schoolmates to join in our refrain.

*Refrain:*

Cathedral, Cathedral, the School we love so well!  
Loyal to your trust, our deeds will ever tell.  
Your School and my School, all hail Cathedral!  
C - A - T - H - E - D - R - A - L.

—Corinna Laughlin

Read more about the Cathedral School, the Sisters, and memories of graduates at the Cathedral's website, [www.stjames-cathedral.org](http://www.stjames-cathedral.org).