



# COURTLY MERCY

*in 1924*



*The First Sisters at  
Georgian Court College*



by  
**Sister Mary-Theresa McCarthy**

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FRONT COVER:

The first Sisters of Mercy  
to staff Georgian Court College.

upper row—left to right:

Sister M. Beatrice, Mother M. Cecelia, Mother M. Bertrand,  
Sister M. Philip, Mother Mary John

lower row—left to right:

Mother Marie Anna, Sister M. Austin, Sister M. Pius

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*in 1924*

by  
Sister Mary-Theresa McCarthy

*Illustrated by*  
*Sister M. Phyllis Breimayer*



*Salve Regina,  
Mater Misericordiae*

## Preface



When Sister Mary Joseph Cunningham, Vice President of Georgian Court College, asked me to do brief biographies of the Sisters who came to Lakewood in 1924, she mentioned that we should know who they were, who their families were and what their education was. In the first quarter of this century, how did a small group of women have the courage to open a liberal arts college on the northern edge of New Jersey's Pine Barrens?

The questions were interesting, and I agreed to look for answers. Never before had I thought about those Sisters individually, yet I always respected them collectively. I am a Francophile and in the Mansion Chapel, I often notice the statues of Therese Martin and Bernadette Soubirous which were erected by the Sisters who transformed Edith Gould's conservatory into a place of worship. I believe these emblematic sculptures represent powerful symbolic choices.

Bernadette's home in Lourdes was the poorest, most miserable hovel imaginable. Therese, on the other hand, grew up in a pink brick mansion surrounded by sumptuous lawns and gardens in Lisieux. In spite of vast material differences, both women became saints.

By placing their shrines in the Mansion Chapel, the Sisters were expressing a philosophy of education. They intended to educate the Bernadettes of this world in order thus to improve their lives; they also planned to encourage Little Flowers to ameliorate their world. The Sisters needed tuition-paying Martins so they could assist the underprivileged Soubirous. Their hope was to accept every qualified applicant regardless of her socio-economic background. They portrayed that aim in marble statuary, and I loved them for it, although I could not have identified them.

I began my research in the archives at Farley Memorial Library where the reaction of a staff member was, "I would expect you to know their names." Her remark motivated my fact-finding determination, and that initial visit to the campus library identified six of the Sisters.

Subsequent research in the Mount Saint Mary Motherhouse Archives uncovered two more. To my amazement, I personally knew six of the pioneers at Georgian Court College, but I was unaware that they had played that role!

Mother Cecelia, the first college president, was Mother Assistant at Mount Saint Mary while I was an Academy student there. She was known as the nun who wore silk stockings and slippers with delicately buckled straps. When I entered the novitiate, my clothing list included black lisle stockings and black Oxfords. I brought them, but on the bottom of my trunk in imitation of Mother Cecelia's taste in footwear, I also packed a pair of black suede loafers and some nylons!



If Mother Cecelia was the most elegant nun at the Mount in the opinion of Academy students, Sister Austin was the most popular. She ran an ice cream parlor, complete with a penny candy counter and she taught us domestic science. Although she was too kind to ever mention my limitations in that area, when it was time for me to be received into the novitiate, she generously offered to make my habits. She knew better than anyone that my sewing ability would not allow me to do it myself! Because she was too humble to discuss her past, I never knew she had been the first home economics instructor at Georgian Court College!

Mother Bertrand was Reverend Mother at the Mount when I was in school. I was only aware that she had taught mathematics at the Court because of her devotion to a Court graduate who had been one of her students and had become a Carmelite nun, Sister Marie of the Eucharist, at the Summit Monastery. Mother Bertrand often asked my Mother to drive her there, and my Mother, believing Carmelites were so holy that whatever they prayed for was granted, would regularly fill her car with butter, eggs, cheese and baked goods, so Mother Bertrand's former student would not go hungry.

My novitiate visiting days were limited to a maximum of one a month, but it was not unusual for Mother Bertrand to say, "If you ask your Mother to drive me to a meeting, you may come for the ride and visit with her." Mother Bertrand was sensitive to family ties.

When I finished my first degree in French, she told me the congregation needed a French teacher. I could have permission to go to graduate school if I gave her my word that I would persevere as a French instructor. I sensed the wisdom of her thinking. Why should she invest in an education I might be unwilling to put to practical use? Since I agreed to her terms, she sent me alone to Laval University. Those days, Sisters traveled in pairs. Mother Bertrand explained that a student nun did not need a companion on campus, and in her opinion, all of Quebec Province should be considered campus for a French teacher. She was broadminded, and when it came to education, she was years ahead of her time, but in my case, she knew that no Irish American in a French speaking university would have time to be a tourist!

It was Laval University that prepared me to join the French faculty at Georgian Court College while three of the Lakewood foundresses were still on campus. Even though I worked with them, I did not realize that Mother Marie Anna, Sister Beatrice and Sister Pius had been here from the start. Now that I have researched their lives, I appreciate what a privilege it was for me to have been their colleague.

My first memory of Sister Beatrice is the autumn card party she sponsored one Saturday shortly after I arrived. She was a dedicated fund-raiser and she put everyone to work on her projects. In those days, weekends began Friday noon; there were no Friday afternoon classes. Every Sister here spent Friday afternoon before the card party in Raymond Hall Kitchen packaging fudge for

bridge players. Some of it was homemade; some was bought from Asbury Park's famous candy shops. Our task was to mix both kinds attractively in hundreds of small boxes. Sister Beatrice was an astute business woman, yet in spite of her vigilant supervision, there were countless pieces of fudge that never found their way into the boxes! Somehow, Friday afternoon temptations were irresistibly sweet!

Another keen business woman was Mother Marie Anna. As our religious superior, she sometimes asked me to take her shopping. She was a quality shopper. When Bargainland featured household goods, we went there for linen tea towels which were more reasonable than they would have been elsewhere. When it came to food shopping however, Mother Marie Anna did not look for bargains. She was happy stopping at Buchanan's market for Persian melons for the Sisters' breakfast on a special feast day. Fridays, she would send me to Wooley's because she considered their fish the freshest available. She believed in buying healthy food, and whatever it cost, she thought she saved at least that much in doctor bills. There was never anyone more thoughtful or more generous than Mother Marie Anna—unless perhaps it was Sister Pius!

The first Saint Patrick's Day I was on campus, her supplier failed to deliver chocolate chip mint ice cream for dinner in Raymond Hall Dining Room. She asked me to take her to buy some. We headed south as far as Toms River, stopping wherever ice cream was sold or served, but no one had any chocolate chip mint. We continued east to Seaside Heights and then north. There was an ice cream parlor in Point Pleasant willing to sell us pistachio. The color was right, but Sister Pius did not have the heart to disappoint college students whose favorite flavor was chocolate chip mint. We went on our way, northward along the shore to Asbury Park. Then we headed west to the traffic circle, where we stopped at the Howard Johnson Restaurant, and to Sister Pius' delight, they sold us several five-gallon drums of chocolate chip mint ice cream. Observing that nun who cared about making students happy, was an inspiration to me.

I do not believe I ever saw Mother Mary John or Sister Philip. After studying their lives, though, I probably know them now as well as I know the six foundresses whose lives touched mine. These latter were truly great women whom I knew only superficially.

As for Sister Mary Joseph's question, "Who were those nuns?", my answer is this: they were unique. Each one was a highly individual person; each one's background was different; each was exceptionally gifted in her own way. What they shared in common was an answer to God's call to sanctity and service. They were all holy, dedicated, daring, caring, intelligent Sisters of Mercy who were confident that with the help of God, they could make a difference in the lives of thousands of women. How did they found this college? Its foundation was a miracle of grace. They were the divinely selected instruments of that grace and they humbly corresponded with its flow of blessings.

For those of us who attempt to follow in their footsteps, they are role models to whom we are indebted for their example of what it means to be teaching religious. It is a humbling, sobering thought to realize that the awesome work they so nobly began in 1924 is now in our hands. May God continue to bless it!

—*Mary-Theresa McCarthy, RSM, Ph.D.*  
*Professor of French*

*Georgian Court College*  
*Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, 1992*







## MOTHER MARY CECELIA

*(Mary Scully)*

1867–1953

1887 • became a Sister of Mercy  
1924–1940, 1946–1949 • administered  
at Georgian Court College

Mother Cecelia was born in South Amboy and grew up in a waterfront mansion with its own bayside dock. As a child, she attended private schools, studied vocal and instrumental music with the best masters of her day, and had five siblings: Jim, John, Margaret, Tom, who became a United States senator from New Jersey, and Sarah (Sister M. Carmelita, RSM), who became administrator of Rita Mercy Hall, Atlantic City. When Sisters of Mercy opened a convent boarding school, Saint Joseph Academy in Bordentown, the Scully girls were among the first pupils registered there. Mother Cecelia was already a recognized equestrian, proficient at riding sidesaddle.

At age twenty, she announced her intention of entering the novitiate in Bordentown. She was an accomplished musician; she was also a landowner whose considerable real estate holdings included the United States Post Office building in South Amboy. Her father was devastated by her decision to go in the convent. As a businessman, he realized his daughter's potential. Perhaps he envisioned her one day owning his Scully Tug Boat Company whose ships plied the waters of New York Harbor and the Hudson River. Her executive ability, however, was destined for another purpose.

She spent her early convent life at Saint Joseph Academy teaching voice and instrumental music. At age twenty-eight, she became Bursar of the Sisters of Mercy of New Jersey. For the next fifty-eight years, she was either Bursar or Reverend Mother or Mother Assistant for the congregation.

It was she who first saw the need for more space than the Bordentown property provided. She convinced her peers, and in 1906, her hopes were realized, as the congregation moved to Mount Saint Mary Motherhouse and Academy in the Watchung Mountains above North Plainfield.

According to Sister LaSalle, who described the move in her book, *The First Fifty Years*, a small group of sisters spent the summer of 1906 at the Mount before there were any windows or doors. "Each morning they walked the three miles to town for early Mass, reciting aloud the rosary as they went along the humpty dirt road that has since smoothed itself into the elegant state highway," Route 22. Sister LaSalle's narration went on to say Mother Cecelia "spent every day at the Mount supervising the work of building most conscientiously."

Two years later, Mount Saint Mary College was founded there. Barely three years after that, on March 2, 1911, a tragic fire destroyed the entire mountaintop building, but Mother Cecelia, thankful that no lives were lost, found the courage to rebuild an even bigger facility. She also had to find the money to finance it because she was still Bursar. In Mount Saint Mary Archives, her hand-written ledger from those days is preserved. No gift was too small for her to record. She listed donors who gave one dollar on the same pages with more substantial contributors. She was a holy, humble, sincere, gentle, tender-hearted religious with a charming sense of humor. Her winning personality found willing benefactors who supported her dedication to educating and empowering women. School re-opened in the brand new Mount Saint Mary College and Academy on Mercy Day, September 24, 1912.

The same year, Mother Cecelia began her first term as Reverend Mother. In that office, it was apparent to her that the college needed room for expansion. She, along with Archbishop Thomas J. Walsh, negotiated with Kingdon Gould at the time when the Sisters were purchasing Georgian Court. The Goulds very much wanted to keep the Connemara Royal Irish Green Marble mantelpiece. Mother Cecelia agreed that they could take it, but their contractor advised them it would be impossible to remove it from the wall of the formal dining room in the Mansion without damaging it. Reluctantly, the Goulds left it where it was, and triumphantly, Mother Cecelia adorned it with two stunning trophies of black onyx and bronze from her family home in South Amboy. Those urns still stand on that magnificent mantle.

A student journalist writing for the Court Page in February, 1953, declared that "Mother Cecelia was the foundress of Georgian Court College and she strove earnestly and selflessly for its success." Just as she had instigated the move to Watchung in 1906, she likewise was the force responsible for moving the College to Lakewood where it opened formally, October 1, 1924. The Court Page article concluded that "as foundress of the college, she earned love, respect, and gratitude due to her courageous pioneering spirit."

Until 1940, Mother Cecelia was president of Georgian Court College. To the George Jay Gould estate, which formed the original Lakewood campus, she added during her presidency Hamilton House and Kingscote, mansions adjoining the college property which were owned by the noted journalist, Arthur Brisbane, who had observed and written about the establishment of the campus. One of his articles, quoted in the 1925 Courtier, described how the Sisters transformed what had been a luxurious holiday home for the children of one wealthy family into a center of learning for children of countless families.

He narrated how "the great rows of box stalls formerly occupied by expensive (polo) horses, have been torn out and replaced by a complete and up-to-date chemical laboratory." He was, of course, referring to the Raymond Hall area whose other alterations included carriage-horse stables becoming a music

studio and a carriage house turned into the students' refectory. This complex likewise housed classrooms and bedrooms and was known to students as the Freshman-Sophomore House. The Casino, which became Junior House, contained the college library. The Casino ballroom hosted tea dances, while the auditorium welcomed games and entertainments. The Mansion was Senior House; the Gate House was Faculty House.

In the first edition of *The Courtier*, published in 1925, the students credit Mother Cecelia's "initiative and business ability" for the "firm social and financial basis" of the College. Her grand-niece, Nancy O'Connor Burke, recalls one day when she was young, and her parents came to call on Mother Cecelia, who happened to be in conference with two business executives, so her family had to wait. As the businessmen left Mother Cecelia's office, her niece in the waiting room, heard them agree that "if she were a man, she would be chief executive officer of some huge New York corporation."

She demonstrated her business ability decades before the world was ready to admit that a woman could possess such talent. She was certainly not, however, the stereotypical business woman. She is remembered as a prayerful nun who sat in a rocker on the Mansion veranda overlooking Lake Carasaljo, and there she prayed her rosary and read her office book. In his eulogy the day of her funeral, February 7, 1953, Monsignor John S. Middleton, Ph.D., professor of philosophy at Georgian Court College and pastor of Old Saint Peter Church, New York City, called her "amiable, holy, refined, discreet and magnanimous."

He said that her office was "as tiny and plain as a Carmelite's cell," and on her desk was an open cardboard box with plenty of change so she could conveniently offer a gratuity to everyone delivering newspapers, telegrams and messages. Monsignor Middleton went on to say that Mother Cecelia always made sure there were cigars for visiting priests. When she ordered them, she may have asked for "Willies" instead of "Phillies," but no priest who was a guest at the College ever did without his favorite brand.

Her innate fine taste and her gracious spirit are reflected today at Georgian Court College where the beautiful crystal and silver from her family home are still used for special events.

Everything indicates that Mother Cecelia was a devout Sister of Mercy, a cultured lady, an astute business woman and a sweet-voiced musician. No one, however, regardless of how gifted, could have established Georgian Court College singlehanded. Seven other extraordinary religious accompanied her to Lakewood to transform a luxurious estate into a Catholic college for women.



## MOTHER MARY JOHN

*(Anora Convidine)*

1871-1951

1888 • became a Sister of Mercy  
1924-1948 • administered  
at Georgian Court College



Mother Mary John was born and raised with her six sisters in Lambertville, New Jersey. She entered the novitiate a year after Mother Cecelia, and from the beginning, they were best friends. On Mother Mary John's reception day, she wore the gorgeous wedding gown that Mother Cecelia had had custom-made for her own reception the year before.

A stately woman, Mother Mary John was Academic Dean of Mount Saint Mary College from its inception in 1908. For the average American in those days, the terms "women" and "higher education" were mutually exclusive. What is taken for granted regarding gender equality now, during the post-feminist final years of the twentieth century, was generally unthinkable in the century's first decade. Far ahead of her time Mother Mary John believed in women's need for a strong liberal arts education.

In *The First Fifty Years*, Sister LaSalle pointed out that when Mother Mary John was appointed Academic Dean, she was not a new-comer to academic administration; she had been directress of Saint Joseph Academy, Bordentown. In her new collegiate position, however, "it was her responsibility to organize the courses, staff the institution, to negotiate for State approval, and to secure the recognition of educational associations and accrediting agencies, so vital to the development of the College. This was no featherweight assignment, but Mother Mary John accepted it courageously."

In addition to courage, she also had the wisdom to procure advice from the best consultants available. According to Sister LaSalle's book, those consultants included "professors from Fordham, Columbia and Harvard Universities." Their experience and their expertise were invaluable assets for when Mother Mary John became Dean of Mount Saint Mary College in 1908, she simultaneously matriculated there as a student, so her personal knowledge of higher education was virtually nihil, but she proved herself a fast-learner.

She received her bachelor of arts degree with the first graduating class in 1912. She then studied abroad before beginning graduate work at Fordham University. In 1916, she became Bursar of the congregation, a position which she held until 1924. This responsibility was in addition to serving as Dean of the college and commuting as a graduate student from Watchung to the Bronx

for course work. Getting her graduate degree did not relieve her schedule, for as soon as she finished her studies at Fordham, she was appointed the congregation's first supervisor of schools. In that capacity, she was required to pass the state examination for New Jersey Permanent Supervisor's Certification which she obtained in 1921.

When she was awarded her masters of arts degree in 1919, she was the first woman ever to earn a graduate degree at Fordham and the first female religious ever to earn a graduate degree from any Jesuit university! Twenty-two years later, in 1941, she received the Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Fordham University. The citation called her a "pioneer nun in graduate school" who had become an "educational pioneer" at Georgian Court College.

This educator, who succeeded where no Sister, no woman, had ever ventured before, was described by her first students in Lakewood as their "revered Dean" and "loved friend" in the 1925 *Courtier*. They evaluated the organization of their curriculum as an example of "the Dean's complete control." They hastened to add, however, that "it is in the capacity of a personal counselor that Mother Mary John most excels." She was a lovely lady who counseled gently, was kind to everybody and never raised her voice. If she discovered that a student was dating a non-Catholic, she worried. Because they were fond of her, the students did not want her worrying, so they often refused dates with non-Catholics. She enjoyed being involved in social as well as academic life on campus. It was she who appointed roommates. She did it well because she personally knew every student and every student's family. When a student lived at a distance, Mother Mary John assigned her a roommate with brothers, thus initiating many romances which resulted in marriage. Speaking among themselves, students affectionately referred to her as "Deanie."

In the *New Jersey Catholic News* on February 10, 1951, her obituary concluded: "If Mother Mary John of the Sisters of Mercy of New Jersey were not a religious, she would have been one of the most publicized women in this area. For 35 years she was dean of Georgian Court College at Lakewood, N.J....There is not a part of the United States which has not been the beneficiary of her self-sacrificing efforts through the influence of alumnae of Georgian Court College whose characters she had such a large part in forming. Because she is a religious, she, in the way characteristic of Sisters, shunned publicity... Not only the expanded Georgian Court but its alumnae will be a permanent monument to her memory."

She and Mother Cecelia made ideal administrators for the early days of the College in Lakewood. Their local religious community included an equally ideal teaching faculty.



## MOTHER MARY BERTRAND

*(Loretta Miller)*

1890-1972

1908 • Became a Sister of Mercy

1924-1939 • taught at Georgian Court College



Mother Bertrand was born in Cleveland, Ohio. She had a brother and three sisters. Her education began in Saint Stephen School, Cleveland, but her family moved to Connecticut where her schooling continued at Saint Mary School, Bridgeport, and Bridgeport Central High school.

Olive, one of her sisters, entered the Sisters of Mercy in January, 1908, and was known as Sister Mary Mark. She went on to become religious superior and principal at Saint Nicholas Parish, Atlantic City. The autumn after Sister Mary Mark entered the novitiate, Mother Bertrand followed in her footsteps. That was the year the college opened, so she became simultaneously a Mercy postulant and college freshman. She received her bachelor of arts degree in mathematics and English with the first graduating class in 1912. She continued her studies at Fordham University where she was awarded a master of arts degree in English and education in 1919. Her dissertation was *The Philosophical Background of Dante's Works*. She went on at Fordham for her doctorate in mathematics and education, completing it in 1927 with a thesis entitled *The Philosophy of Education—Mathematical Phase*. That very year, she pursued post-doctoral work in mathematics at Columbia University and the following year, she went to Germany for further study in mathematics and philosophy at the University of Munich-Bavaria.

Because of what were generally accepted as conventional limitations at that period, a female candidate for higher education in mathematics and philosophy would not ordinarily have been admitted without certain reservations. This, however, was no ordinary female candidate. Her academic success in fields traditionally reserved for males was proof of her intellectual superiority. She used her mind to demolish myths that women were less competent in certain areas where only men excelled.

It is amusing to imagine the raised eyebrows at Columbia University in 1927 when this post-doctoral mathematician appeared on campus in a floor-length habit made from ten yards of pleated black serge with a big bustle visible under the black voile veil which hung down her back to about mid-calf and was pinned at her head to a stiff-starched white linen coif with a starched piqué coif-front concealing her forehead, while a starched white linen guimpe covered her chest, and a large rosary dangled from her leather cincture. This

was the year when flapper outfits were at their most flamboyant, but it is fairly certain that no fringed costume uptown along Broadway attracted more attention than Mother Bertrand's Mercy habit.

She had the elegant bearing of a European aristocrat. She also had an exceptionally keen wit which made her company most enjoyable.

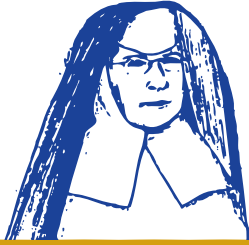
In acknowledging Mother Bertrand as faculty adviser to the College's first yearbook, the 1925 Courtier staff thanked her for the "wise and cheerful assistance she so graciously lent." They praised her "brilliant intellectual gifts," which they perceived as enhanced by the "simplicity which always accompanies a truly great mind." She possessed the versatility to major in literature, philosophy, mathematics and education. This varied background made her an eminently successful teacher because she could draw from her expertise in several disciplines. It is often said that very bright people do not make good teachers because they are unable to comprehend that certain concepts can be difficult. The opposite was said of Mother Bertrand. She had the ability to anticipate difficulties and make the difficult seem simple. She loved her calling as a teacher and always had the welfare of every student in her mind and heart. As she molded intellects, she also formed character. Virtues associated with her included integrity, courage, openness, patience, prayerfulness, humility and gentleness.

One of her better-known students at Mount Saint Mary College was the singing star of stage, screen and radio, Jessica Dragonette, whose autobiography, *Faith Is a Song*, told of Mother Bertrand's profound influence. It said that this teacher was also the "guiding spirit" of Miss Dragonette's life.

In 1958, giving the keynote address at Mother Bertrand's golden jubilee, Sister Pierre said to her, "College women who studied philosophy and mathematics under your tutelage may have become a bit rusty in epistemology or calculus with the passing of years. However, they will never forget the spiritual and moral lessons absorbed both in and out of the classroom, from their so greatly admired teacher. You have shown them how to build a good philosophy of life, inspired them to be sensitive and responsive to beauty. Your sole endeavor was to create on the college campus an atmosphere of sanctified intelligence... to produce Christian women of courage, of confident poise, of feminine charm... who can and will enrich the world."

Sister Pierre's talk mentioned that Mother Bertrand left her own memorial on the Georgian Court College campus, for it was she who energetically and perseveringly insisted that the chapel bell tower be built. The chime of that bell is still a reminder of the values Mother Bertrand personified.





## MOTHER MARIE ANNA

*(Mary Callahan)*

1888–1971

1905 • became a Sister of Mercy  
1924–1968 • taught and administered  
at Georgian Court College

Mother Marie Anna and her brother Joseph, who became a Justice of the New York State Supreme Court, were born in Manhattan and grew up in Saint Charles Borromeo parish, Harlem. She went to New York City Public School #5 and then to Hunter College High School where she took advanced courses designed to grant college credits to gifted students. As a result, she had credit for some college work when she arrived at the novitiate in Bordentown. After the move to Watchung and the foundation of Mount Saint Mary College, she continued her studies, receiving her bachelor of arts degree in Latin in 1912.

She began graduate study of Latin literature at Columbia in 1920. She continued at Fordham and taught fulltime at Mount Saint Mary while pursuing graduate work. Convents then had a lights-out rule which terminated all illumination at ten o'clock each evening. That was the hour when Mother Maria Anna and Mother Bertrand would surreptitiously meet in a Mount Saint Mary stairwell to do their graduate work by candlelight. Afternoons, they were busy selling candy and ice cream to Mount students. With their profits, they paid for their Fordham tuition, books and carfare. In spite of such hardships, Mother Marie Anna earned a Ph.D. in philosophy and education in 1927. The title of her dissertation was Rome and the Romans: What the Teacher of Latin Should Know About Them. In the meantime, she had moved to Lakewood as one of Georgian Court's original faculty members.

Mother Maria Anna shared her recollections of the 1924 school year in an interview she gave the Asbury Park Press. It appeared on October 12, 1958. The reporter accurately described her as a "soft-spoken woman with a warm smile" and quoted her as saying "our standards were high in those days." She taught Latin, classical civilization and education. Her students never failed to be impressed by her ability to use a typewriter with a Greek keyboard!

The 1925 Courtier editor wrote of Mother Maria Anna, "Generosity is the keynote to her character, a virtue noticeable in every act of her daily life, and which has endeared her to every student ... her personality is one which receives wide-spread commendation." Even today, her former students recall that she always had confidence in them; she treated even the youngest freshman like an adult. Her trust in them inspired her students to act as maturely as she knew they could.



The 1958 Asbury Park Press article outlined Mother Marie Anna's philosophy of higher education. She told the reporter, "We should accept in our colleges all qualified applicants willing to fulfill course requirements. These will realize the benefits of a college education no matter what they do after college." Those were the criteria she valued. If a student demonstrated her academic preparation and indicated her willingness to accept the challenge of college course work, she deserved the opportunity to earn a degree, regardless of her financial situation.

Mother Marie Anna's career as an outstanding educator was given widespread recognition in 1956 when Seton Hall University honored her with an LL.D., a doctor of laws degree. It was her attorney brother who commissioned C. J. Fox, the portrait artist for such illustrious families as the Kennedys, to do the lovely painting of Mother Marie Anna which hangs on the first corridor in the Mansion, enabling her to smile down posthumously on passing students.





## SISTER MARY BEATRICE

*(Gertrude McMullin)*

1888-1964

1903 • became a Sister of Mercy  
1924-1964 • taught at Georgian Court College



Sister Beatrice was born into a large family in Philadelphia where she attended Hallihan High School for three years before entering the Mercy Novitiate in Bordentown at age fifteen. Her older sister, Irene, was already Sister Mary de Pazzi, RSM, a grade school teacher. Sister Beatrice completed her final year of high school at Mount Saint Mary Academy and went on to the New York College of Music where she earned her bachelor of music degree in 1920 and her Ph.D. in piano and composition in 1924. While doing graduate work, she was also teaching music at Mount Saint Mary College where one of her most famous voice majors was Jessica Dragonette.

Once Sister Beatrice finished graduate school, she did postdoctoral work at the University of Munich in Germany. She was academically well prepared to move to Lakewood and establish the music department at Georgian Court College.

It was apparent, however, that her students were more impressed by her than by her education. They wrote in the 1925 Courtier, "It would not require her doctor's degree... to show the heights which her talent has attained. The composer of several brilliant numbers, she has been the inspiration of the musical successes of the year."

Among her compositions, to which the yearbook referred, were two marches, a "Conference March," published in 1922, and a "College Girls' March," published in 1924. The latter date suggests that college women "marching" from Watchung to Lakewood may have been the inspiration for this piece. Neither of these compositions revealed the name of the composer. They were modestly signed "A Sister of Mercy." Contemporary propriety may have prohibited a female composer from flaunting her name on her works. Luckily for posterity, however, it was not considered unmaidenly or vainglorious for this gifted musician to publish her lively marches!

When the Courtier mentioned Sister Beatrice's musical successes, the annual musicale which she conducted was surely what was meant. Every student in the college appeared on stage wearing a white evening gown, singing in the chorus and playing a musical instrument during the gala performance whose traditional headliner was Jessica Dragonette. On these occasions, Sister Beatrice personally inspected the hands of every pianist to verify that there would be no long fingernails tapping the keys!

Although the musicale was the main event of the year for her department, Sister Beatrice organized several other extracurricular activities. As faculty adviser to the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she hosted a series of monthly lectures by outstanding priests. During the 1924–25 academic year, she planned twelve bridge parties whose profits were included in the purse given to Mother Cecelia by the Sodality.

She also assisted the Courtier staff and is thanked in the yearbook for “her kindly encouragement and cooperation.” Because music practice required self-discipline, it was not surprising that students described Sister Beatrice as strict. Her nervous students experienced their palms perspiring during piano lessons. In spite of that, they liked their music teacher because they felt she was always on their side, always willing to take the part of any student needing moral support.





## SISTER MARY AUSTIN

*(Hannah Coad)*

1872-1951

1910 • became a Sister of Mercy  
1924-1925 • taught at Georgian Court College



Sister Austin and her brother grew up in Brooklyn. Her parents had emigrated from Quebec. They sent her to Saint Joseph Academy in Bordentown, and she was graduated from there in 1888. Probably, she knew then that she had a Mercy vocation but she also sensed a family obligation, so she returned to Brooklyn where she taught home economics in a public high school.

By the time she felt free to enter Mount Saint Mary Novitiate, she was already thirty-eight. As a teacher of domestic art and science, she was in demand, for her discipline was a useful one. The majority of young women she taught were destined to become homemakers because teaching was then the only suitable profession for female college graduates. If they pursued that career, it was normally only until they married and then they became full-time wives, grateful to have some knowledge of home economics. In this regard, the 1925 Courtier said, "The extremely practical nature of Sister Austin's work makes her very popular."

Another thing that made her popular was the fact that her protégées were away from home on an isolated campus with the nearest sweet shop half a mile away. She used these circumstances advantageously: a student craving something sweet would be motivated to bake the richest, stickiest, cinnamon buns on earth! Another favorite recipe was deep fried apple slices; they were dipped in batter before being dropped into sizzling shortening and finally sprinkled with powdered sugar. She also had a specialty called "spiffins," which were S-shaped short bread. These were buttery-delicious cookies. The Courtier editor probably had them in mind when she boasted about Sister Austin: "In the culinary art she is unexcelled."

Student cooks were not the only ones lucky enough to sample Sister Austin's recipes. For the President's Tea, she was called on to produce her exquisite finger sandwiches. If Archbishop Walsh decided to stay for dinner, she whipped up her famous sweet potatoes. She mashed them, formed them into balls, pushed a marshmallow into each ball, rolled them in chopped nuts and browned them in the oven. Her miniature, individually-tinned fruit cakes were frequently used as benefactors' gifts.

It is important to note, however, that the yearbook editor was perceptive enough also to appreciate Sister Austin's beautiful personal qualities:

"A spirit of kindness permeates everything with which she comes in contact, and one does not hesitate to confide implicitly in her, with a certainty of understanding aid."

Obviously, all four Sisters who came to teach in Lakewood and the two who came as administrators were holy, courageous, competent and caring. Those six, however, could never have known such astounding success were it not for the dedicated support services supplied cheerfully by the lay sisters who accompanied them. An observer would have to look closely to notice any difference in the attire of these lay nuns. They wore the same kind of habit and veil, but on the end of their long rosary instead of the ebony and ivory Mercy cross worn by choir sisters, these women wore a large crucifix. They were not required to recite the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. Instead, they prayed fifteen decades of the rosary every day.

Two of them were a vital part of the band of daring women who first staffed Georgian Court College.





## SISTER MARY PIUS

*(Nora Conlan)*

1891-1963

1917 • Became a Sister of Mercy  
1924-1963 • Worked at Georgian Court College



Sister Pius was born in Ireland, to a farming family in Blackrock, Millstreet, County Cork. She attended National School in Kilcorney, and the education she received there awakened her intellectual curiosity so successfully that she deliberately continued learning for the rest of her life.

She and three of her sisters, as very young women, immigrated to America. They settled in Saint Mary Parish, Manhasset, Long Island, New York. When Sister Pius applied to enter Mount Saint Mary Novitiate, she had been in the United States twelve years and was employed as a domestic on the upper East Side of Manhattan.

In the convent, she worked as a lay sister at Trenton Cathedral and Mount Saint Mary Motherhouse before being assigned to supervise the kitchen at Georgian Court College. In the early days, she used the Casino kitchen, and meals were served at poolside tables. She had been told to pack an overnight bag and help temporarily; she stayed fifty-five years! Wherever she was, this self-taught woman scrupulously stayed abreast of current events by never missing Gabriel Heater's evening newscast. She kept in touch with church reaction to world news by faithfully reading the weekly Brooklyn Tablet.

She voted Republican, not like many voters because she was born Republican, but because as a naturalized citizen, she studied American politics more seriously than native-born Americans were apt to do. She knew exactly why she was a registered Republican.

As she worked to establish and supervise the kitchen for Raymond Hall Dining Room, no effort was too much trouble for her. Many of the vegetables and fruits were grown on campus and she would go up to "the farm" behind the present Arts and Science Center parking lot, to pick the produce herself when it was ripened to perfection. She canned peaches and tomatoes; she made jams and jellies.

She rose before dawn every morning to bake her famous home-made muffins and biscuits for the students' breakfast. Her cuisine never resembled institutional cooking. There was always homemade soupe du jour for lunch. She took pride in serving her famous chewy chocolate macaroons and her "chocolate goo cake." This latter was white sponge ring-cake covered with

chocolate mousse and topped with fresh whipped cream. It was the favorite dessert on the Georgian Court College campus for many years. Another favorite recipe was creamed chicken, the traditional Sunday dinner. Sister Pius believed in traditions. That was why she always baked old-fashioned beans for Sunday morning breakfast! The New Jersey Mercies originated in New England where Boston baked beans were a time-honored dish on Sunday mornings. Sister Pius' were soaked on Saturday, slow-baked overnight in earthen crocks and served after Sunday Mass to the shocked amazement of every freshman on her first weekend at the Court.

Sister Pius always showed compassion for the poor families in the local community. She consistently delivered food to them, so they, too, were able to enjoy her wonderful cooking.

Underprivileged students were also a concern of hers. When she came to Lakewood, the students' meals were served by white-gloved professional waitresses. Eventually, she replaced them with students who had obvious financial need. It was she who awarded the first work scholarships to bright young women who would not otherwise have had the means to pay college tuition. She created a residence hall for them in East Wing above Raymond Hall Kitchen and she herself lived there as their hall dean.

Her strong desire to help the less fortunate is particularly touching when the hardships of her personal life are considered. She left her native land to do menial labor in a foreign country. When she decided to enter the novitiate, one of the questions on the application asked if the candidate had the financial means to provide herself with the outfit required to enter and then if she could underwrite the costs of her wardrobe for the following three years, Sister Pius' answer was a single word, "No." She had been poor, and she never forgot what it was to be poor. She dedicated her life to helping the poor. Those she assisted are countless.

Her thoughtful kindness included those who were voluntarily poor: her Sisters who were living surrounded by Gould grandeur, yet were vowed to evangelical poverty. So they would have gifts for their families at Christmas, she baked a fruit cake and Irish soda bread for each one of them.

Her photograph, on the wall in Raymond Hall Kitchen, was placed there in her honor by the people on the kitchen staff who knew her so well and loved her so dearly.





## SISTER MARY PHILIP

*(Mary Duffey)*

1876–1938

1895 • *Became a Sister of Mercy*  
1924–1938 • *Worked at Georgian Court College*

Sister Philip was born in Ireland. She was twenty-two years old when she entered the Mercy Novitiate in Bordentown. She served there and at Mount Saint Mary Motherhouse as a lay sister until Georgian Court College was established.

She came to Lakewood to take charge of the butler's pantry in the Mansion. Her official duties there were twofold. It was she who did most of the housekeeping but she would take time out from that to prepare the silver tea service mid-morning and mid-afternoon when she served a collation to the college administrators and any guests they happened to be entertaining.

Her other duty was acting as the original director of student health services at the Court. Before there was an infirmary on campus, she kept a large wooden medicine chest well-stocked with aspirin and bandages at the end of the counter in the butler's pantry. Any student not feeling well would stop to see Sister Philip, a slim, petite, pale woman with a long, thin face and glasses who wore a starched, floor-length, white apron over her habit. No registered nurse ever made a more professional appearance! If that alone did not make a student feel better, Sister Philip's Irish accent was guaranteed to bring a smile. She understood what it meant to be far from home and not feel well; she also knew the danger of giving in to every least discomfort. She patiently listened to ailing students and was as likely to give them oranges as patented medicines.

She is the only one of the founding sisters who never left Lakewood. She died here in 1938 and she is buried here in Saint Mary Cemetery.



## Postface

For obvious reasons, we can proudly consider these eight extraordinary women as foundresses of our Lakewood campus. It is, however, unlikely that they thought of themselves in those terms. Both Mother Bertrand and Sister Beatrice served as faculty advisers to the 1925 Courtier which lists "Founders of Georgian Court College." There are clergymen and laity, including prominent politicians, but there are no Sisters of Mercy listed.

Those whom the Sisters saw as "Founders" of the college, were generous benefactors whose donations made it possible to transform a millionaire's playground into a beautiful college campus. Without that financial support, it would not have been easy, in spite of their good will, for the Sisters to answer their call to do God's work in educating and enhancing the lives of young women.

Mother Cecelia had the reputation of speaking to everyone as her equal. Never did she address anyone either with deference or with condescension. This may explain why contributors to her cause were considered "Founders of Georgian Court College." The participation of donors equaled in importance the efforts of the nuns. Both were essential; both shared the same objectives.

Nearly seventy years later, as we transform the Gould golf course into a library and student lounge, we are seeking a new generation of benefactors to join us as "Founders" of this new complex. We are hopeful that generous donors will assist us. Perhaps they will be inspired by our eight pioneers, who are now enjoying their heavenly reward. From their eternal vantage point, they must be gratified to observe their work continuing and to see their ideals still cherished.

The early Sisters of Mercy saw education as a partnership requiring educators and society to pull together, sharing the strengths and the resources of both partners. There can only be educational progress when society at large supports and cooperates with educators. Confident that today's society understands the importance of financing the education of women even more than our 1924 predecessors did, we Sisters of Mercy now staffing the College pray that divine grace, which inspired our Founders and Foundresses, will be renewed in us and in those who choose to be our partners in this new endeavor.

When Mother Cecelia died, Monsignor Middleton wrote that "the Oak Room can never be the same without her in her rocking chair." He expressed his hope that no one would ever get rid of her chair. With the passing of time, it has disappeared, but now that I have learned the names of the Court's first Sisters and discovered some of the details of their lives, maybe I should feel prompted to start looking through storerooms to see if the rocker still exists! Meanwhile, this much is certain: the spirit that rocker represented for Monsignor Middleton is very much alive.



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