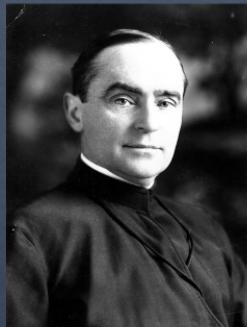


**“She Was Here First.”
THE ORIGINAL OCCUPANTS OF BOLAND HALL
1918-1919**



Women's History Month Talk

**“SHE WAS HERE FIRST”
THE ORIGINAL OCCUPANTS OF BOLAND HALL
Stephen J. Ochs, Ph.D., Lawler Chair of History**



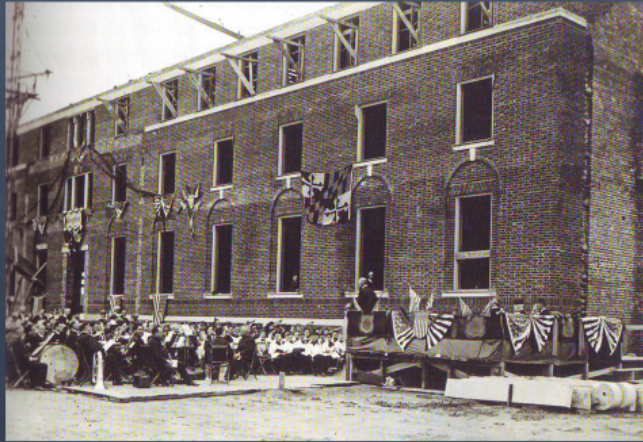
Alphonsus J. Donlon, S. J.

Rector-President of
Georgetown University,
1912-1918 and “second
founder” of Georgetown
Prep

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During his tenure as president-rector of Georgetown University (1912-1918), the Reverend Alphonsus J. Donlon, S. J., succeeded in his plan to relocate the Georgetown University Preparatory School from the University campus to a new location in Garrett Park, Maryland. In doing so, he overcame construction delays and cost overruns on the first campus building that were caused by wartime shortages of materials, labor unrest, and price inflation.

The installation and blessing of the Cornerstone



On June 9, 1917, however, he presided at the ceremony marking the installation and blessing of the cornerstone of the partially completed new building and looked forward to the opening of school set for October 1918.¹



¹ See, Stephen J. Ochs, "Cornerstone: The Move to Garrett Park, 1912-1917," *ALUMNEWS* (Winter 2017-2018), pp. 30-39.

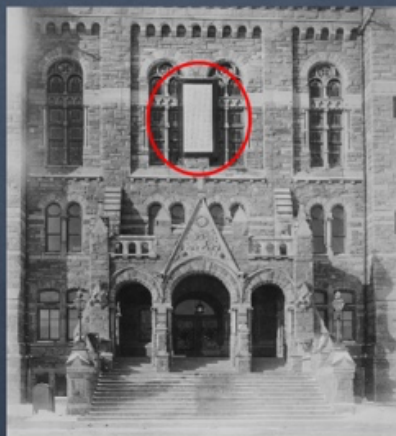
The Prep building would indeed be completed and occupied by the summer of 1918. But, in an ironic twist brought about by wartime necessity, the first



occupants of the new campus of the oldest Catholic boys' high school in the United States would not be adolescent boys, but rather single women, many of whom were members of the United States Marine Corps Reserve (F), who had come to the Washington, D.C., area for wartime service. As we celebrate Women's History Month, it is fitting to look back to 1918 and remind ourselves that in terms of Prep's history, "She Was Here First."²

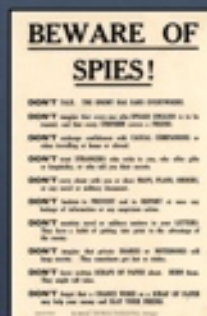
² Hat tip to Mrs. Karen Napolitano, Director of Counseling Services at Georgetown Prep, for suggesting the title of this article.

Service flag draped on front of Healy



Congress's declaration of war against Germany on April 6, 1917, stirred great excitement at Georgetown University. Twelve days after U.S. entry into the war, students from three Georgetown University campuses (the college – including prep students – law, and medicine) participated in a massive “grand war demonstration” that featured speeches and songs in the balloon-festooned quadrangle known as the College Yard. Fr. Donlon believed that Jesuit institutions should demonstrate their patriotism by placing facilities and properties at the disposal of the government.

Public suspicion focused on Americans of German descent. Anti-German sentiment in the United States was fanned by the Government's Committee of Public Information that was created to produce pro-war propaganda.



He also hoped that such a move would defuse any public doubts about the loyalty of the German-born Jesuit Provincial Superior of the Maryland and New York Jesuits, " Rev. Anthony J. Maas, S. J. Thus, on November 26, 1917, Fr. Donlon offered the new Prep building to the U. S. Government for use during the war, even though that meant that the Prep school would not open as planned in 1918.



Donlon's proffer proved timely as the federal government struggled to address the burgeoning housing crisis in the District of Columbia as job seekers, civilian volunteers, and drafted soldiers flocked into the Capital. The population of the District skyrocketed from approximately 350,000 in 1914 to 526,000 by the war's end in November 1918. Nearly 100,000 of those new arrivals were women. They tended to be young and single and took jobs, heretofore considered exclusively male, in department stores, munitions plants, and in the offices of the vast wartime bureaucracy that had sprung up.

“Tempos”



*The Navy and Munitions
Buildings are in the
foreground.*

◆ The War Department employed large numbers of women as civilian clerks, and many of them, along with female Navy Yeomen, worked in a mass of temporary buildings (“tempos”) constructed on the Mall.

The War Department employed especially large numbers of women as civilian clerks, secretaries, and stenographers who worked in a mass of temporary buildings (“tempos”) constructed on the Mall.

Finding suitable living accommodations for women, however, proved problematic and eventually involved Georgetown Preparatory School.



According to a report of the United States Housing Corporation, “Besides suffering from indecent crowding of rooms, lack of sanitary conveniences, uncleanliness, and exorbitant prices for quarters, many young women . . . actually went hungry from meal to meal because the day’s allowance for food would not cover three hearty meals.” The Housing and Health Division of the War Department warned that, unless steps were taken immediately, the housing crunch threatened to restrict the number of federal employees, thus threatening the war effort.

Abigail Aldrich “Abby” Rockefeller



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Into this situation in the summer of 1917, stepped Abigail Aldrich “Abby” Rockefeller, the wife of John D. Rockefeller, II. and one of the nation’s wealthiest and most influential women. A male contemporary said of her, “Had she been a man, she would have commanded an army.” At her urging, the National Board of the YWCA approved creation of the YWCA War Work Council with Mrs. Rockefeller as its chairperson.

The slogan of the YWCA War Work Council



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The War Work Council promoted the slogan, “For Every Fighter, A Woman Worker.”

In January 1918, Mrs. Rockefeller met in Washington, D.C., with Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to discuss plans for improving housing conditions for women employed by the War Department. Two U. S. Army officers served as liaison between Georgetown University and YWCA officials. As a result, on July 1, 1918, Georgetown agreed to lease the Prep school building and 10 adjoining acres of the campus to the YWCA War Work Council for a yearly sum of \$10,000.

The YWCA Georgetown House”



Georgetown House, as the YWCA dubbed the Prep building, contained a well-stocked kitchen in the basement and a dining room on the first floor. Reception rooms, often referred to as “beau parlors,” were available on either side of the entrance to the main lobby “for the girls to receive their male friends in pleasant surroundings.” For the YWCA, the most vital element of a house was the sort of woman who managed it, and a “Miss Harrington” – kind and disciplined -- assumed that position.

The pledge card that every resident of the Georgetown House had to sign and date

GEORGETOWN Y. W. C. A. HOUSE
ROCKVILLE PIKE, MD.

As a resident of the Young Women's Christian Association House of Rockville Pike, Maryland:

I hereby agree to cooperate with the War Work Council of the National Board in its endeavor to uphold the standards of its houses for Government Employees:

By living in the spirit of the work of the Young Women's Christian Association in my relations with the staff, the employees and other residents.

By joining with the management in adhering strictly to all Government rules and regulations pertaining to food, fuel and health.

By paying for my board and room semi-monthly in advance.

By conducting myself at all times as a conscientious worker for my Government and a patriotic, loyal citizen of the United States of America.

I solemnly agree that if I violate any part or parts of the above agreement I forfeit my privilege of remaining a resident of the Y. W. C. A. House at Rockville Pike, Md.

Date _____ Signed _____
Rockville Pike, Md.

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Residents of Georgetown House were required to sign and date an agreement to conduct themselves at all times as conscientious workers and as patriotic and loyal citizens and to forfeit their privilege of remaining at the YWCA House if they violated any part of the agreement.



Just as Georgetown House was opening its doors in July, intensive fighting on the Western Front magnified the need for increased numbers of combat troops. When the Marine Corps discovered that a sizable number of male Marines were still doing clerical work, the Corps decided to recruit females for the United States Marine Corps Reserve (F) to replace them.



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On August 13, 1918, thousands of women between the ages of 18 and 40 responded to newspaper announcements and appeared at recruiting offices throughout the country. After an interview, they faced high-pressure tests for accuracy and speed in stenography and typing. This rigorous process dramatically winnowed the numbers. In New York City, for example, only 5 of 2000 applicants were selected. In all, 305 women from across the nation were enrolled during the four months of recruiting.

Margaret L. Powers ?



One of the women in this photo is likely thirty-three year-old Margaret Powers of Quincy, Massachusetts.

19

One of the five recruits who had successfully run the qualification gauntlet in Boston in September 1918 was thirty-three-year-old Margaret L. Powers of Quincy, Massachusetts. Between August and November, she, her comrades, and other small groups of Marine Reservists from around the country converged on Marine headquarters in Washington, D. C.

USMC Headquarters



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Initially, Marine officials assumed that women would not be able work as fast or as efficiently as the men they were replacing. They supposed, therefore, that they would need to hire more women than men at a ratio of 3:2.

Navy Yeomen and Marine Reservists



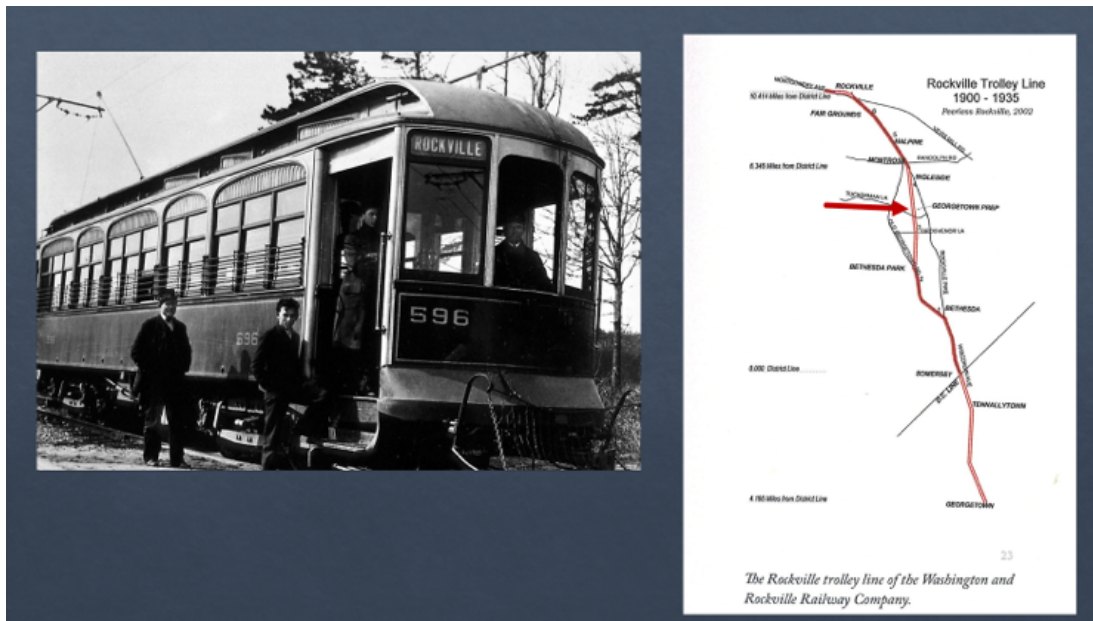
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Women Marines, however, quickly disabused those officials of their erroneous assumptions. Powers, for example, proved so skillful that she was immediately assigned as secretary to Colonel William Fay in the Office of the Commandant and eventually rose to the rank of sergeant, the highest rank for enlisted personnel. Female Marines received the same pay and subsistence/quarters allowance -- \$83.40 -- as enlisted men of corresponding rank.



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Thanks to Mrs. Rockefeller's cooperation with the Marine Corps, Georgetown House stood ready to receive Powers and her companions. Powers later described Georgetown House as "... a beautiful place with private rooms, and excellent food prepared by a former tea room owner." The situation of so many Marines housed together in one building fostered comradeship among them and boosted morale, as did their participation with other Marines throughout the Washington D. C., area in drills, parades, rallies, and social functions.



The residents of Georgetown House traveled to and from work on a street car line popularly known as the “Toonerville Trolley.” The trolley-stop at Georgetown House consisted of a small wooden shelter that stood across from the western boundary of the campus and was serviced by a street car every half-hour.



To reach it, the women, attired in their tailor-made, two-piece suits of green wool in the winter and tan khaki in the summer, walked down a path that led directly from the back door of Georgetown House to the trolley tracks (today's bike path that runs along the western boundary of the campus.) **23.**



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The Marines had to rise especially early in the morning to get down to the Capitol Ellipse located behind the White House in time for morning drill at 7:00 A. M.

The residents of Georgetown House endured a tiring 60-minute commute each way, and often worked six, 10-hour-days per week,



but many of the women found time to enjoy Washington, D. C.'s vibrant social life. "Any fellow was proud to take out a female Marine Reserve," recalled Corporal Louise Hedtler, and few lacked dates. According to Corporal Elizabeth Shoemaker, "Washington was a dancing town," where "[t]here were a lot of roof gardens on top of the hotels and we danced our heads off."



Work and play for the women of Georgetown House, however, also occurred against the background of the great influenza pandemic of 1918-1919. This catastrophe, which first appeared in the Washington, D. C., area in August and raged between October 1918 and February 1919, would eventually kill approximately 3,000 people in the city and its environs. The Georgetown House women were relieved to be living in their single rooms in a country setting, but apprehension stalked the corridors. Margaret Powers remembered that “If anyone even coughed or cleared her throat, she was suspect.”

The Pandemic ebbed by March 1919, but packed hospitals, reeling under the demand for beds, felt compelled to discharge patients as soon as their temperatures

returned to normal.



Place of Recuperation for Women
Recovering from the Flu.



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While no longer contagious, many of these women remained too weak to return to work. Recognizing the need, Miss Harrington set aside part of the building for convalescing women until they regained their strength.



Victory Celebration
in Washington, D. C.

War Ends with an Armistice
on at the 11th hour,
on the 11th day, of the 11th
month of 1918.



Paradoxically, in the midst of the fear and death created by the flu epidemic, came the unexpected exultation of victory in Europe with an armistice signed on November 11, 1918. As the guns fell silent, the country exploded in celebrations – celebrations in which the Georgetown House ladies no doubt participated.

Margaret L. Powers Returned to Quincy



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The end of the war also signaled the beginning of a great demobilization of the armed forces and the civilians employed to support them. The Marine Corps transferred Sergeant Powers to inactive status in the Marine Corps Reserve on July 31, 1919, whereupon, she rejoined her family in Quincy and continued her lifetime occupation as a stenographer. Margaret died in Massachusetts on January 30, 1982, at the age of 97.



Rev. John B. Creeden, S. J., Rector-President of Georgetown University (1918-24)

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With the war over, Georgetown University's new Rector-President, John B. Creeden, S. J., (1918-24), turned his attention to opening Georgetown Preparatory School at its new site by September 1919. Meanwhile, the YWCA Housing committee decided to close Georgetown House in the middle of May.

Abby Rockefeller Letter, 1919



June 16, 1919

“ . . . I wish to tell you how very much we appreciate the many kindnesses and courtesies shown to us you and your associates. One of the secretaries said to me that she thought that our dealings with you have been more pleasant and satisfactory than with any other group of men.”

Abby A. Rockefeller

your associates. One of the secretaries said to me she thought that our dealings with you have been more pleasant and satisfactory than with any other group of men.

33

On June 16, 1919, with the YWCA lease about to formally expire, Abby Rockefeller sent Father Creeden a short letter. “I wish to tell you,” she began, “how very much we appreciate the many kindnesses and courtesies shown to us by you and your associates.” Revealing both gratitude and the gender-related frustrations associated with her work, she added, “One of the secretaries said to me that she thought that our dealings with you have been more pleasant and satisfactory than with any other group of men.”



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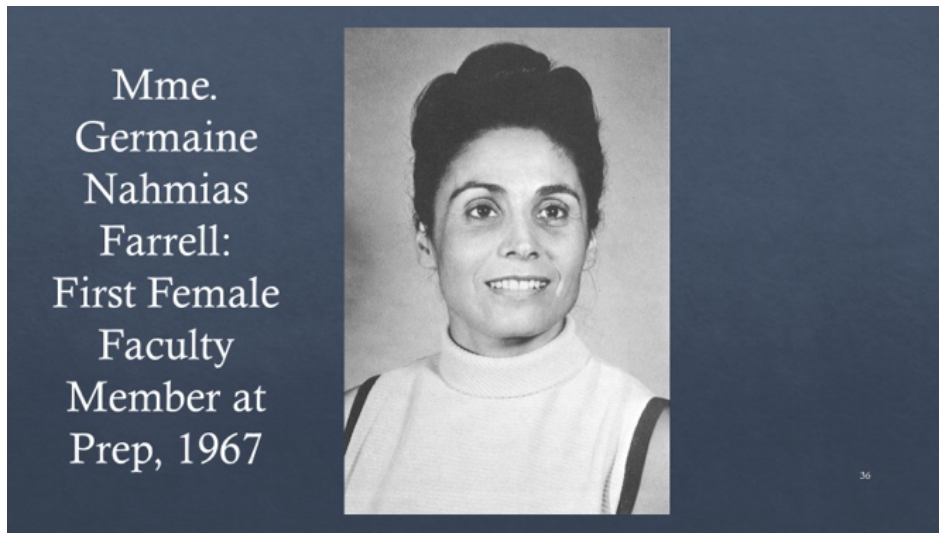
The self-evident contributions of women to winning the war challenged gendered stereotypes and gave added impetus to the drive for a constitutional amendment to guarantee woman suffrage -- a political goal achieved in 1920 with the ratification of the 19th Amendment. The new campus of the nation's oldest Catholic boys' high school had served as one small staging area of the much larger political and social changes taking place in the nation.

A LEGACY OF THE WOMEN : The "Temporary Gym" (1919-1993)



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The women who had resided at the Prep campus left for their respective homes apparently leaving behind few signs of their residency. Yet, all was not quite as it seemed. For, as it turned out, the women's stay at Prep had important ramifications for the athletic program at the "New Prep": namely, construction of the first gymnasium on campus. Five thousand dollars of the rent paid by the YWCA to lease Georgetown House was used by the College to construct a wooden structure on the Prep campus described by Fr. Creeden as a "temporary gymnasium." That "temporary" building, which came to be known as the "Old Gym," would stand until 1993 when it was demolished to make way for construction of the Haas Humanities Building.



The voices echoing in Boland Hall would remain overwhelmingly male for many decades, but real transformation for Georgetown Prep with regards to women would begin in 1967, when Germaine Nahmias (later Farrrell) joined the Modern Language Department, which she eventually chaired, at the dawn of a truly revolutionary era for American women. Over succeeding decades of the 20th and 21st centuries, increasing numbers of talented female faculty, administrators, and staff would enrich and transform Georgetown Prep. After all, SHE had indeed been here first!

