

Unveiling and Dedication Ceremony
of the
Texas Historical Marker
for the Site of
VILLA MARIA URSULINE ACADEMY

Sunday, March 19, 2006

located at the intersection of East Villa Maria Road
and Ursuline Avenue in Bryan, Texas



Ursuline Convent, Bryan, Texas.

Villa Maria Academy.

presented by:

The Brazos County Historical Commission
and the Jos. B. Collerain, Sr. family

PROGRAM

2:00 p.m. Reception at St. Joseph Church
Parish Activity Center for the
visiting Sisters and a display of photos
and memorabilia

2:45 p.m. Welcome by
Rev. Msgr. John A. McCaffrey,
Pastor of St. Joseph Church

Recognition of Guests & Dignitaries
by Henry Mayo

History of the Order of Saint Ursula
in Texas, by the Ursuline Sisters

History of the Villa Maria Ursuline
Academy of Bryan, by Henry Mayo

History of the 1901 Cornerstone and
statue of Mary from the VMA Grotto
by John Blair

Presentation of Photo and copy of
Research Material to Carnegie Center
of Brazos Valley History
by Henry Mayo

3:30 p.m. Closing & Departure for Unveiling
Ceremony

3:45 p.m.

Reconvening at Marker Site

Welcome and Recognition of Guests, by
Dr. Charles Schultz, Chair of the Brazos
County Historical Comm.

History of Saint Ursula's Hill
by Henry Mayo

Unveiling of Marker
by Collerain family

*Emily
Alford*

Blessing of the Marker, by
Rev. Msgr. John McCaffrey

Acceptance of the Marker
by Mayor Ernie Wentreck
and the Bryan City Council

*Russell
Brady*

Photos and Closing

A Brief History of the Villa Maria Academy

The great hurricane of 1900 was devastating to Galveston, but ironically, it brought a period of unexcelled educational opportunity to the girls of Bryan. The founding of the Villa Maria Ursuline Academy of Bryan, in 1901, was the direct result of the havoc wreaked on the City of Galveston.

The Ursuline Sisters were searching for a place to establish another school for girls, away from the coast, when they came to Bryan. They were welcomed with open arms and the promise of land and at least \$1000 to establish their academy and convent. When asked to donate, the citizens of Bryan gave over \$2400 and on Nov. 20, 1900, Mary and W.R. Cavitt deeded 50 acres to the Ursulines. This land was part of a larger tract that adjoined the Boonville townsite and once belonged to her uncle, Harvey Mitchell. Within a year, the school was open on Saint Ursula's Hill, just east of town.

The Sisters also filled a need at the nearby Catholic parish by teaching at St. Joseph Catholic School. In this way, both the boys and girls of the area were offered the opportunity to receive a fine education from the Sisters of the Ursuline Order, who had a 400 year history in education. Advertisements for the Academy usually boasted of their fifty acre site with farm crops and animals, a large oak grove, basketball and tennis courts, and a "health record unsurpassed".

In 1904, covered porches were added around the main building. They were actually necessary buttresses, because the building's structural integrity was in doubt. In about 1911, a three-story auditorium and classroom annex was built adjacent to the main building. The Villa Maria Academy had modern conveniences, and it was heated by steam and lighted with electricity. The Bryan-

College Interurban Railway constructed rails and begin regular service to the Academy in 1913.

Each year, the Sisters were confident that enrollment would increase, but after 28 years, the Villa Maria Academy closed its doors, in 1929. The Ursuline Sisters returned to Galveston. W.S. Howell, Jr. purchased the land. The buildings were razed and he constructed a large home using the bricks from the once grand school building. In 1942, Howell sold the estate to his Alma Mater, the nearby boys preparatory school, Allen Academy. They used the home as a dormitory, during World War II. The school administrators had great plans for the property, but they were never realized. In 1973, the land was sold again to cover debts. The once magnificent home had fallen to such a state of disrepair that it too was torn down in the 1980's, but the bricks were used once again.

Today, over 100 years after their first use, these bricks are part of the guest center at Messina Hof Winery and Resort in Bryan. The Villa Maria cornerstone and the statue of Mary from the grotto on the Academy site, are at St. Joseph Church in Bryan. Some of the petrified wood, originally part of the Ursulines' grotto, then used to build one at St. Joseph Church, is now being used for a grotto at St. Mary's Catholic Church near Utopia, TX.

It is the hope of the Brazos County Historical Commission that this marker will help perpetuate the historical significance that the Ursuline Sisters and Villa Maria Academy had in this community.

This history and commemorative pamphlet were created by Henry Mayo. Any questions or comments are welcome, and can be directed to hpmayo1@verizon.net.

CORNER STONE LAYING.

IMPRESSIVE CEREMONIES ON ST. URSULAS HILL.

BISHOP GALLAGHER THE CELEBRITY.

An Impending Spectacle Witnessed by an Immense Gathering—Contents of Corner Stone.

The people of Bryan fully appreciate the importance of the location of the Ursuline Academy in this city, and since the inception of the movement have given it cordial and hearty support. In magnitude, yesterday's celebration attendant upon the laying of the corner stone of the Villa Maria, was in keeping with the importance of the event, and its success augurs well for the future of the institution.

The violent rain storm of the morning was succeeded by an almost perfect day of sunshine and crisp, bracing air. The morning was spent in preparations for the celebration, the grand march at six this side and others being kept busy with the details. At 1:17 P. M. Rev. N. A. Gallagher, D. D., arrived from Galveston, accompanied by a number of clergymen and sisters of the Ursuline community. Mr. L. L. Foster was also on board with the College band and a large contingent of A. and M. cadets under command of Senior Captain Grady.

The bishop dined at the home of Mrs. John Daly, and then proceeded to the parochial residence. At 3 p. m. he pronounced solemn benediction at St. John's church.

The various organizations were properly formed by the sides, the assembly was sounded at 3:40 p. m., and the procession moved to St. Ursula's hill, east of the city, to the following order:

ORDER OF PROCESSION.

- Bishop, Mounted
- United States Flag
- Grand Marshal and Staff
- A. and M. College Band
- Order of A. and M. College
- Students Allen Academy
- Italian Society
- Young Ladies B. Society
- Ladies B. Society
- St. Elizabeth Society
- Band—Prof. Zehnal's
- W. D. Society
- St. Joseph's Society
- Third Regiment Band

IN CARRIAGES:

- Mayor and City Council
- Trustees Public Schools
- Faculty of Allen Academy and A. and M. College
- Citizen's Building Committee
- Ursuline Sisters

CLERGY:

- Rev. Father Thos. Hennessy
- Judge J. W. Doremus
- The Bishop, Rt. Rev. N. A. Gall.

Bishop of Galveston, and Celebrant of the religious occasion.

Rev. Chas. Kelly, pastor of St. Joseph's Church, Bryan, Texas.

Rev. Thomas Hennessy, pastor of Assumption Church, Houston, Texas, Orator of the day.

Rev. J. Lonergan, S. J., Chaplain of the Ursuline Convent, Galveston.

Very Rev. Mother Marie of St. Julien, Prioresse General of the Ursulines.

Mother Mary Joseph, Local Prior.

William McKinley, President of the United States.

Joseph D. Sayers, Governor of the State of Texas.

Major J. N. Mooting, Mayor of Bryan, Texas.

The Citizens Committee: Judge J. W. Doremus, Messrs. J. D. Daly, Malcolm Cairnes, W. S. Howell, A. J. Buchanan, Dr. Paul M. Baynes and Dr. J. L. Fountain, through whose kind and energetic exertions, the site of the "Villa Maria" Academy was purchased and donated to the Ursuline Community of Galveston.

General H. B. Stoddard, Grand Marshal of the Day.

Mr. N. J. Clayton, architect, Galveston.

Mr. C. S. Ott, Sculptor of the Corner Stone.

Mr. Geo. W. Jenkins of Bryan, Contractor.

L. D. S.

Judge J. W. Doremus was introduced and delivered a half hour's address which was replete with good things of timely interest and frequently applauded. He remarked upon Bryan's growth and progress and her importance as an educational center; gave a history of the order of Ursulines, their work in Texas, the circumstances which led them to Bryan, and bid them cordial welcome, commending them and their work most heartily. The speaker also enlarged upon the subject of education and urged that in the education of girls the arts and accomplishments should be supplemented with liberal practical training for home life and domestic duties.

Following Judge Doremus, Rev. Thomas Hennessy of Houston, orator of the day, delivered an able and eloquent address touching the purposes and work undertaken here by the Ursuline sisters. This closed the exercises at the grounds.

A reception was tendered to Bishop Gallagher by the ladies of the parish at the parochial residence at 6 p. m.

The music supplied by the A. & M., Third regiment and Zehnal bands was an inspiring feature of the celebration.

Children in Carriages

The procession was perhaps the longest ever seen in Bryan and extended from the city to the arch on the content grounds. Here the organizations as they formed in open order and the Bishop, clergy sisters and others passed through the lines to positions on the grand stand. At the appointed hour with due form and solemnity the bishop laid the corner stone, a massive piece of Tennessee marble beautifully sculptured and appropriately inscribed.

CONTENTS OF BOX IN COLLEGE ROOMS.

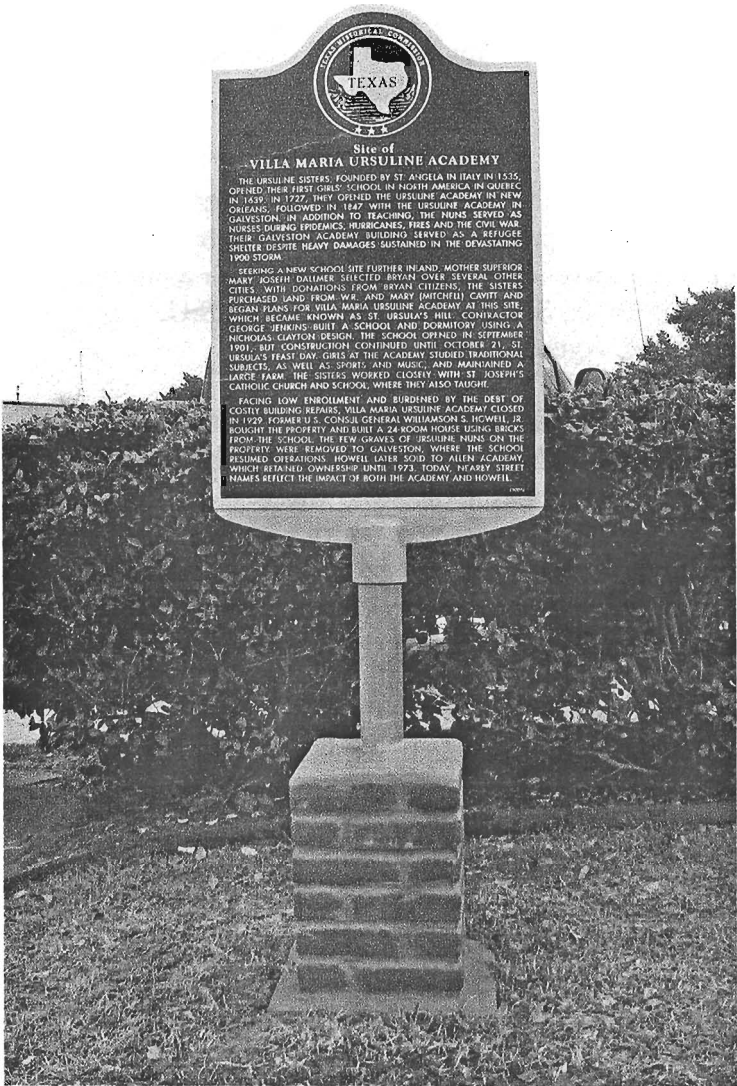
- A copy of the Rules and Constitution of the Ursuline Order.
- A copy of the Prospectus of the Ursuline Academy, Galveston, Tex.
- Copies of "The Bryan Morning Eagle," "The Brazos Pilot," "The Galveston News," and "The Southern Messenger" containing articles relating to the new Academy.
- A list of the Ursuline Community, Galveston, Texas.
- A list of the Contributors to the Building Fund.
- A Programme of the Public Exercises on March 19th in connection with the Laying of the Cornerstone.
- A number of blessed Medals, and a collection of sacred Bibles.
- A Parchment containing the following names:
 - Leo XIII, the Sovereign Pontiff, graciously reigning.
 - Cardinal Francis Satoll, the Protector of the Canonically United Ursuline Order.
 - Rt. Rev. N. A. Gallagher, B. D.

FUNERAL OF A NUN

All that was mortal of Mother St. Agnes of the Ursuline convent who laid to rest this morning in the cemetery burial beneath the ground at this institution. Her remains were accompanied to their last resting place by the sisters of the community and many friends of the beloved departed. The burial was marked with the white carnations and white roses and the numerous floral offerings formed a blanket of lovely tribute over the entire plot.

Briefly music was celebrated in the church at the instance of Rev. Father Coffey of the parish church of Galveston, and assisted by nearly all of the clergy of the city. The body lay in state in the chapel for the hours of solemnity was practiced with the most and the people of the academy and friends of the deceased. There were no other funerals, no decorations in mourning, for in the community of the Ursulines "hymn death is but the passing from the world of sorrow and sin to everlasting life and happiness, and why should there be weeping for the soul? God hath gone to the reward! The sisters occupying a portion of the chapel bore lighted candles throughout the mass and burial service following the mass for the departed, and those they carried to the grave, where they were accompanied. No undertaker provided over the burial arrangements, and after the burial service had been read the mass replaced the top of the casket, a plain rosewood affair, and the remains of the departed, which were carried to the grave by six of the sisters. The entire ceremony was marked with such simplicity and solemnity, without any outward pomp or display, that it constituted a most impressive scene.

Newspaper Article about March 19, 1901 Events (from the Villa Maria Scrapbook)



Site of
VILLA MARIA URSULINE ACADEMY

THE URSULINE SISTERS, FOUNDED BY ST. ANGELA IN ITALY IN 1535, OPENED THEIR FIRST GIRLS' SCHOOL IN NORTH AMERICA IN QUEBEC IN 1650. IN 1722, THEY OPENED THE URSULINE ACADEMY IN NEW ORLEANS, FOLLOWED IN 1847 WITH THE URSULINE ACADEMY IN GALVESTON. IN ADDITION TO TEACHING, THE NUNS SERVED AS NURSES DURING EPIDEMICS, HURRICANES, FIRES AND THE CIVIL WAR. THEIR GALVESTON ACADEMY BUILDING SERVED AS A REFUGEE SHELTER DESPITE HEAVY DAMAGES SUSTAINED IN THE DEVASTATING 1900 STORM.

SEEKING A NEW SCHOOL SITE FURTHER INLAND, MOTHER SUPERIOR MARY JOSEPH DALMER SELECTED BRYAN OVER SEVERAL OTHER CITIES. WITH DONATIONS FROM BRYAN CITIZENS, THE SISTERS PURCHASED LAND FROM WEL AND MARY (MICHIE) CAVITT AND BEGAN PLANS FOR VILLA MARIA URSULINE ACADEMY AT THIS SITE, WHICH BECAME KNOWN AS ST. URSULA'S HILL. CONTRACTOR GEORGE FENNESSY BUILT A SCHOOL AND DORMITORY USING A NICHOLAS CLAYTON DESIGN. THE SCHOOL OPENED IN SEPTEMBER 1901, BUT CONSTRUCTION CONTINUED UNTIL OCTOBER 21, ST. URSULA'S FEAST DAY. GIRLS AT THE ACADEMY STUDIED TRADITIONAL SUBJECTS, AS WELL AS SPORTS AND MUSIC, AND MAINTAINED A LARGE FARM. THE SISTERS WORKED CLOSELY WITH ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SCHOOL, WHERE THEY ALSO TAUGHT.

FACING LOW ENROLLMENT AND BURDENED BY THE COST OF COSTLY BUILDING REPAIRS, VILLA MARIA URSULINE ACADEMY CLOSED IN 1929. FORMER U.S. CONSUL GENERAL WILLIAMSON S. HOWELL, JR. BOUGHT THE PROPERTY AND BUILT A 24-KILOBIT HOUR URBAN BRICKS FROM THE SCHOOL. THE FEW GRAVES OF URSULINE NUNS ON THE PROPERTY WERE REMOVED TO GALVESTON, WHERE THE SCHOOL RESUMED OPERATIONS. HOWELL LATER SOLD TO ALLEN ACADEMY, WHICH RETAINED OWNERSHIP UNTIL 1973. TODAY, NEARBY STREET NAMES REFLECT THE IMPACT OF BOTH THE ACADEMY AND HOWELL.

The brick column is built with bricks from Howell's garden walk, originally from the Ursuline Academy.

Special Thanks to:

The Sisters in attendance today:

Sr. Mary Margaret Prenger, O.S.U., Sr. Kathleen Barnes, O.S.U., Sr. Carla Maria Crabtree, O.S.U., and Sr. Josephine

The Sisters at the Ursuline Center in Crystal City, Missouri, who greatly aided our research by sending copies of documents and photos from their archives, Sr. Joan Bretz, Sr. Rosemary Meiman, O.S.U. and Sr. M. Agnes Hermes

Mary Alford and the Collerain family, who paid the required fee for having the historical marker cast, in honor of their grandmother who was a VMA student

Paul and Merrill Bonarrigo and the late Tom Borski, owners of the Academy site, who unhesitatingly shared their information and gave permission to visit the site

Rev. Monsignor John A. McCaffrey, Helen Metzger, Mae Fazzino, Regina Operstény, Arlene Petoski and Betty Stetz from St. Joseph Catholic Church, for their help with the reception and dedication ceremony

Henry, Sandra and John Mayo, and Dr. Charles Schultz, who installed the marker and brick column

Past and present members of the Brazos Heritage Society and the Brazos County Historical Commission who helped with the research for this marker, especially Colleen Batchelor, Henry Mayo, Regina Operstény and Julie Schultz

And all others who helped with the procurement, installation and dedication ceremonies of this marker