Both the “outsider” status of the Catholic Church in nineteenth-century America and its traditionally conservative position on women’s social roles shaped its perspective on women’s higher education. Catholic colleges for men were numerous, but no corresponding colleges for women existed. The national hierarchy, for the most part, still considered higher education for women not only unnecessary but possibly dangerous to “true Catholic womanhood.” Bishops warned that however “noble” in intellectual accomplishments Protestant women’s colleges might be, they were unfriendly toward the Catholic Church and to be viewed with suspicion. Nevertheless, by the 1880s and 1890s, middle-class Catholic women were enrolling in growing numbers in public colleges as well as in private, but non-Catholic, women’s colleges.

The hierarchy was not wrong about the presence of anti-Catholic sentiment in Protestant-supported colleges. Until 1898, Wellesley College’s founder, Henry Fowle Durant, required that faculty members belong to evangelical Christian churches. Although this policy softened to encompass members of other Protestant denominations, the ban on Catholic faculty persisted. In 1896, college president Julia Irvine, supported by trustee and former president Alice Freeman Palmer, defied it by hiring a Catholic for the French Department over the strong protest of Durant’s wife, Pauline. When Irvine proposed to hire a Catholic as choral director of the Beethoven Society, however,
Mrs. Durant appealed to the evangelist Dwight L. Moody, a powerful trustee, who publicly reproached Irvine and her supporters for being willing to “turn the whole college over to the Catholics.” And some private colleges made it hard, at times impossible, for Catholic students to fulfill their religious obligations. At the turn of the twentieth century, for example, the Quaker managers of coeducational Swarthmore College, intent on providing a “guarded education,” forbade students to attend church services off campus.

The growth of Protestant-supported women’s colleges in the late nineteenth century encouraged Catholic sisterhoods to consider developing comparable institutions. For nearly a century, nuns had conducted flourishing boarding academies attracting Protestant as well as Catholic girls. Among the best known was the Georgetown convent school, founded in 1799 by the Sisters of the Visitation in Washington, DC; in 1838 it enrolled one hundred students. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was increasingly clear that secondary-level education was inadequate preparation for careers in the professions, business, government, and social service. Women’s orders like the School Sisters of Notre Dame, with their long histories of high standards in education and growing numbers of young entrants, were well-positioned to fill the gap in higher education for Catholic women.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame

Founded in 1597 by the young Frenchwoman Alix LeClerc (1576–1622) and Rev. Peter Fourier, the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, originally known as the Canonesses Regular of Saint Augustine, Congregation of Our Lady, operated schools for girls throughout western Europe until the suppression of religious orders during and after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. In 1833, Caroline Gerhardinger, known by her name in religion as Mother General Theresa of Jesus, restored the order in Munich, Bavaria, and held office as its first general superior until her death in 1879. A strong leader, she vigilantly protected the order’s right to govern itself and determine its corporate works. In 1852, while seeking church approbation for the sisters’ constitution, she refused to accede to the archbishop of Munich’s dictate that a priest head all the motherhouses of the order. “By setting up [clerical] directors in every motherhouse,” she insisted, “the School Sisters and all their schools and boarding establishments would be placed under male direction contrary to the good of the sisters and the schools.”

Despite intense episcopal pressure, Mother General Theresa held her ground, and by 1859, Rome had approved the constitution. The congregation would have one general superior, and she would be a member of
the order. Like all religious communities, the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame was hierarchical in structure. From the central generalate in Munich, the mother general and her assistants soon governed an international network of provinces. Election of officers took place every six years at a general chapter. In consultation with the generalate, provincial superiors in provincial motherhouses appointed superiors of local convents and assigned them individual sisters. Soon the network was growing rapidly.

In July 1847, only fifteen years after the order’s reconstitution, Mother General Theresa escorted five volunteers to the United States to begin the order’s work in the New World. After opening a motherhouse in Baltimore, the see city of the Catholic Church’s first archdiocese in the United States, she appointed Sister Seraphina von Pronath, the eldest of the group, its superior. The sisters, who had normal school educations and had passed teachers’ examinations in Munich, initially conducted classes for girls in neighboring German parish schools. With financial support from King Ludwig I of Bavaria and the Bavarian Louis Mission Society, Gerhardinger spent $18,000 on a three-story brick building on Aisquith Street to serve as a motherhouse for the order and a girls’ school. The education of girls was a top priority, she told King Ludwig: “Religious education for the girls is as essential here as their daily bread. . . . Our institute will be the first and only German institute for girls in America.”

In 1850, Gerhardinger transferred the US motherhouse from Baltimore to Milwaukee and appointed twenty-six-year-old Josephine Friess, known in religion as Sister Mary Caroline, as North American vicar general. Friess, born in Paris of French and German parentage, was well-educated and astute. At every opportunity, she championed her adopted country’s people and culture, and encouraged teachers in the order’s many schools to emphasize civic virtues and history. Her favorite song, “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean,” written in 1843, captured her patriotic spirit. Friess and Mother Seraphina von Pronath both recognized that for the order to succeed in the United States, it had to modify its strict cloister rule, which prevented sisters from freely moving outside their convent walls and posed obstacles to fundraising, teaching, and community development work. Friess traveled to the Munich generalate in 1850 to appeal in person for special consideration for US convents. She had some success in the matter of cloister, but her superiors denied her request that sisters be allowed to use English rather than German in community prayers and annual retreats.

By the 1870s, the congregation’s rapid growth, as well as the great distances between convents, was making it difficult for Mother Caroline Friess, as vicar for North America, to govern approximately 850 sisters and 90 novices across the United States and, as of 1871, Canada. With the encouragement of Baltimore’s archbishop, James Roosevelt Bayley, in 1876 Mother
Theresa Gerhardinger established a provincial motherhouse in Baltimore. Sister Mary Theophila Bauer, Friess’s longtime assistant, was appointed superior of the new province in 1877. At this time the Baltimore province numbered 116 sisters, 38 novices, and 30 postulants. The following year, the province admitted another 31 candidates. In 1879, the Munich generalate introduced a commissariat to promote unity among sisters and convents in the two US provinces and “advance mutual aid in the establishment of new houses.” Assisted by a vicar general and four councillors, Friess, as commissary general, would now govern all sisters in the US provinces and report directly to the general superior and her council.

In the 1870s, Mother Theophila Bauer again appealed for more relaxation of cloister rules. This time, Mother General Theresa made no concessions. She believed that stricter observance of cloister rules was the best way to combat what she saw as “increasing worldliness” among American nuns. “If the sisters in America are permitted to go out, not only to Church, or funerals and processions, but into stores, out into the country, or even driving, they will become completely secularized,” she warned Bauer. Activities like “visits, conversations, entertainments, dramatic performances [are] . . . against the spirit of the order, as are all carriage rides, walks in the country, working in the habit and with men, also going out collecting, playing with little pets: cats or dogs, etc.” The cloister rules certainly did not prevent the US provinces from prospering. By 1892, the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame had become the largest Catholic sisterhood in North America. Its approximately two thousand members educated seventy thousand students in twelve female academies and three hundred parochial schools in the United States and Canada. Two of these schools, both in Baltimore, set the stage for the founding of the College of Notre Dame of Maryland in 1895.

The Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies

In 1863, the order opened a boarding high school for girls adjacent to its Aisquith Street motherhouse. The key figure in the development of the Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies, known as the Institute of Notre Dame, was Louise Wegman (1836–86), a native of Rochester, New York, known in religion as Sister Mary Ildephonsa. An incorporator of the 1864 state charter that empowered the order to conduct schools in Maryland, she became the school’s first directress. The school’s vigorously American values, curriculum, and educational methods troubled some conservative sisters, who complained to Mother Caroline Friess in Milwaukee that Wegman was unfit to direct the school: she was a “worldly” young woman who showed insufficient regard for traditional educational methods. While many of their grievances seem
petty in retrospect, such as the charge that she allowed students to stage “theatrical plays at examination time,” tensions ran high. In an effort to resolve the matter, Friess asked Mother General Gerhardinger to consider removing Wegman. But Gerhardinger refused, asking Friess pointedly, “By removing Sister Ildephonsa from the Institute will you not lower its standards?”

In 1870, in response to growing public interest in educating girls beyond the high school level, Mother Mary Barbara Weinzierl and Sister Ildephonsa applied to Mother Caroline for permission to purchase property in Govanstown, a neighborhood northeast of downtown Baltimore, for a second collegiate institute. They anticipated that a large boarding school would attract Protestant as well as Catholic girls from all sections of the country as well as abroad. Friess, who felt that the order ought to concentrate on parochial schools for the children of working-class families rather than on selective boarding schools for girls from upper-class families, “emphatically refused.” However, her superiors in Munich disagreed, approving the project and instructing her to assist in its financing.

**Map 1.** Baltimore, Maryland. The College of Notre Dame of Maryland (now Notre Dame of Maryland University), as well as Loyola University of Maryland, were once located beyond the city’s northern boundary; the SSND motherhouse and the Institute of Notre Dame are on Aisquith Street downtown. Map by William L. Nelson.
The Baltimore sisters moved quickly to acquire over fifty-eight acres of real estate on Charles Street Avenue for the school. On April 17, 1871, they acquired thirty-three acres, at $800 per acre, adjacent to Saint Mary’s Catholic Church, and in 1873 purchased a $10,000 seven-acre tract called “Sheridan’s Discovery,” containing freshwater springs for drinking water. They also secured the neighboring nineteen-acre Troxall estate and Villa Montrose, a large house on the property, for $45,000. In 1878, excavation of a swampy section of Sheridan’s Discovery created the Lake of the Lindens, a two-level lake encircled by a carriage drive. The lake featured a bridge spanning the falls between the upper and lower lakes, a boat house, and numerous swans and ducks. A lay sister managed the pump house—as one early student wrote, “fulfilling her monotonous duty in spiritual calm.”

Mother Mary Barbara Weinzierl, the Baltimore superior, officially headed the project, assisted by Sister Ildephonsa Wegman, directress of the Aisquith Street school. Wegman took the lead in selecting the school’s site, architect, and contractor. Although a noted Baltimore architect, J. Crawford Neilson, designed the school’s main building, he apparently had nothing further to do with the project; he does not seem to have visited the site or supervised any construction. Instead the nuns relied entirely on SH & JF Adams, Builders, an established and highly respected local firm that had constructed their Aisquith Street convent school a decade earlier. Samuel Adams assured the sisters that he could get top-quality materials at very low prices and complete the job for $80,000. His commission would be 10 percent of the total cost of the project. In April 1871, the sisters accepted these terms and made a verbal contract with Adams. This was poor judgment, as became evident in December 1872, when Adams informed them that the building’s revised cost was $100,000, a figure that ballooned to $150,000 by February 1873. An alarmed Mother Caroline alerted her Munich superiors to the evolving financial crisis.

The sisters, “shocked beyond expression,” had few options. The building was too near completion to change contractors, and they had widely advertised that the Notre Dame of Maryland Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies would open the following September. Reluctantly, the order’s superiors agreed to borrow up to $30,000 from Adams to ensure that he would complete the building: “We could not see how to do better,” the annals record. They also borrowed from the Equitable Society of Baltimore, “creating ground rents on their land as security.” When Adams presented his final bill in December 1874, the sisters’ lawyer, A. Leo Knott, offered him $10,000 less than he asked. He filed suit, agreeing to arbitration after two years of litigation. The final settlement awarded the sisters $10,000 plus half of Adams’s commission, “a very great moral gain in our favor,” wrote the convent annalist. However, in the end, the cost of land, architectural
services, and building construction totaled nearly $300,000, leaving the order with heavy debt.

Reminiscent of protests in the 1860s against Wegman’s leadership at the Institute of Notre Dame, conservative sisters objected that she had made irresponsible financial decisions during the construction of the Charles Street school, that the school’s physical scale was pretentious and worldly, and that the building’s exterior was too “elaborately ornamented.” But Friess recognized that Wegman had aimed to model the school’s architecture loosely on the centralized large building favored by early Protestant-supported women’s colleges. Wellesley’s College Hall, which had opened in 1875, housed “classrooms, dormitories, and administrative offices . . . [as well as] the library, chapel, dining hall, gymnasium and even a large art gallery.” Friess ignored Wegman’s critics and simply chided her for a few interior features, such as the building’s “wide corridors.”

Despite construction problems, the Notre Dame of Maryland Preparatory School and Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies on Charles Street opened on schedule on September 23, 1873, with 63 students. It was this school that would become the direct predecessor of the College of Notre Dame. For several years, however, the new school was governed as an annex to the Institute of Notre Dame on Aisquith Street. Boarders from the downtown school moved to Charles Street, and by the end of its first academic year, the new school registered 101 boarding students from “nineteen States and three Continents.” Tuition, room, and board charges were $220. Thirty-six sisters, two lay faculty, and five priests made up the staff. Among the nuns were fourteen lay sisters who worked as “housekeepers, infirmarians, and what might be called farm hands [tending cattle, poultry, and bees].”

As directress, Wegman seized every opportunity to publicize the new school. She scored a coup when President Ulysses S. Grant, whose wife’s nieces, Bessie Sharp and Betty Dent, were attending the school, agreed to preside at its first commencement on June 14, 1876. To Wegman’s delight, the president’s appearance brought national attention to the infant Collegiate Institute. The day’s events opened at four o’clock in the afternoon with a lavish dinner for the president and Mrs. Grant and about thirty notable citizens, among them Baltimore archbishop James Roosevelt Bayley, Maryland governor John Lee Carroll, Baltimore mayor Ferdinand C. Latrobe, and military dignitaries. At seven o’clock, the three-hour graduation ceremony began with the national anthem as the processional. The entire school of 124 students, dressed in white and representing three continents and nineteen states, sat on the commencement hall stage. Grant awarded diplomas to the seven graduates, as well as prizes, medals, and crowns to meritorious students from all the classes.
Six decades later, a graduate remembered how the ceremonies that day had triumphantly witnessed to the nation’s centennial: “Sister Ildefonsa [sic], intensely patriotic, wished to make the day different from any ordinary Commencement.” There were, however, conservative nuns who assessed the commencement dinner in honor of Grant as far too extravagant for a convent school. They reproached Wegman for the debt incurred during the school’s construction, and interpreted her preference for “American” over German educational methods as disloyalty to the order. It was not unusual for nineteenth-century female administrators of church-related schools to be accused of “worldliness.” As late as the 1890s, legendary Bryn Mawr College president M. Carey Thomas faced considerable criticism from “Plain” Quakers for the school’s stunning new architecture, furnishings, and landscaping, features they considered to be deplorable departures from traditional Quaker values. Wegman’s situation, however, was particularly strained since she resided with her critics in the campus convent.

Given the hierarchical structure of religious communities in the nineteenth century, provincial and local superiors were extremely important in enabling or inhibiting change. They held responsibility for all community projects, and delegated only limited authority to the sisters whom they appointed to head the schools. For Wegman, this proved to be an insurmountable obstacle. Under a cloud within the order, isolated and discouraged, she wrote to Archbishop Bayley on September 26, 1876, to request a dispensation from her religious vows. It was intolerable, she told him, to be “in constant disunion” with her superiors. When she challenged their directives, she felt she was “a disturber of the peace” within the convent, stirring up “disaffection, discord, unhappiness and endless trouble for myself and others.” Mother Caroline Friess privately conceded that “much that had been said about Sister Ildephonse [sic] was false and untrue.” On July 24, 1877, Wegman left the Collegiate Institute, and the Baltimore sisters never heard from her again. Despite her critics, Wegman had developed a flourishing school with a growing national reputation, and her legacy was vindicated when Sister Meletia Foley, who shared her educational values, succeeded her as the school’s directress.

Faculty, Academics, and Religious Life

The Collegiate Institute made advanced academic achievement available to its students from the beginning. From the founding of the Institute of Notre Dame in 1863, directress Ildephonsa Wegman had invited professors from local universities to lecture to students on various subjects. Among the
earliest was William E. A. Aikin, MD, a chemistry professor at the University of Maryland Medical School. A graduate of the 1860s remembered his commitment to the new girls' school: “Every week brought the Ven. Prof. Aiken [sic] from the University of Maryland.” According to a university colleague, he was “a strict Catholic” and “a man of very striking mien. . . . He wore glasses and a wig, and his long flowing white beard gave him a very venerable appearance.”

Wegman continued this practice at the Notre Dame of Maryland Collegiate Institute in 1873. A number of Johns Hopkins faculty, notably those in scientific fields, were part-time lecturers at the institute. Robert Dorsey Coale, an 1881 PhD graduate of Johns Hopkins, was “the first student to enter the Johns Hopkins University on its opening in 1876.” He succeeded William Aikin as professor of chemistry at the University of Maryland. He also lectured part time at Notre Dame between 1883 and 1891. The writer and scholar Richard Malcolm Johnston, founder of the Penn Lucy School for boys in Baltimore, “gave yearly courses of [weekly] lectures to the senior classes in the Johns Hopkins University and the Notre Dame School at Baltimore.” Lucien Odend’hal, prominent in Baltimore music circles and, in 1884, the first director of the Johns Hopkins University glee club, taught at the Collegiate Institute from 1877 until 1895, and then at the college until 1933.

Except for Rev. Dwight E. Lyman, DD (religion), Mademoiselle Conlon (French), and Dr. J. Lopez (Spanish), religious sisters made up the Collegiate Institute’s first full-time faculty. Lyman (1818–97), pastor of the Catholic parish in Govanstown, had served as an Episcopalian priest before his 1854 conversion to Catholicism. Sister Meletia Foley, as “assistant matron of the senior circle,” taught English, history, and science, and Sister Jeannette Duffy, “assistant matron of the junior circle,” instructed in mathematics and astronomy. Sister Evangelista Meyer taught Latin, German, music, and elocution, and Sister Engelberta Heuer taught art. Students could fulfill their foreign language requirement by taking German, French, or “an extended course” in Latin. For an additional fee, they could opt for private lessons in other languages. Although courses in music and art did not carry academic credit, they were popular electives.

Following the practice of southern female seminaries, in the 1870s the Collegiate Institute awarded four “degrees”: major and minor mistress of liberal arts and major and minor mistress of English literature. These differed mainly by course of study and level of foreign language mastery. The most demanding, the major mistress of liberal arts, required completion of the liberal arts course, the study of two foreign languages for three years, and a demonstrated ability to speak both fluently. The minor mistress of
liberal arts degree required completion of the liberal arts course and two foreign language courses with distinction, plus a demonstrated ability to speak one of these fluently. Students who qualified for a major mistress of English literature degree satisfactorily completed the English language course and three years' work in two foreign languages. Students completing the English language course plus three years' work in one foreign language received the minor mistress of English literature degree.\(^49\)

The Collegiate Institute aimed to provide a rigorous liberal arts curriculum as its cornerstone. However, since parents wanted their daughters to become proficient in the domestic arts, the curriculum also included courses in plain sewing, embroidery, and cooking. “The time thus occupied is not spent in vain, as it enables the pupils to attend wisely and faithfully to what is necessary to the comfort and happiness of home,” noted the 1874 catalog.\(^50\)

While it may have been popular with parents, neither faculty nor students showed much enthusiasm for the domestic science program. A valedictorian from the 1880s revealed the school’s emphases when she called on her peers to “step forth to fight our part in life’s arena” and to seek “influence and honor” through “commendable achievements.”\(^51\) She made no reference to women’s place in the home. By 1893, the Collegiate Institute offered no home economics courses, and just two elective vocational courses, one in elementary bookkeeping, commercial law, and related topics, and another, a “teachers’ course,” for advanced students interested in becoming schoolteachers.\(^52\)

In its lack of emphasis on “vocational” subjects, the school differed from many female schools of the late nineteenth century. The School Sisters of Notre Dame viewed the domestic arts and other practical subjects as marginal to the central purpose of their preparatory schools and collegiate institutes. Mother Theresa Gerhardinger warned teachers against spending excessive time on vocational subjects: “The children learn trivialities soon enough; they grow to like this sort of thing, and thereby lose their inclination for doing useful and necessary things”—a category that pointedly did not include the domestic arts.\(^53\)

Although a majority of Collegiate Institute students were Roman Catholics, there was always a good representation of Protestants in the student body. The first Jewish student, Harriet Rosenthal, graduated in 1890.\(^54\) In 1876, non-Catholics did not take religion classes, “unless otherwise desired by the parents,” but by 1881, they were expected to “attend instructions on Christian Doctrine, unless otherwise stated by the parents.”\(^55\) Eighteen-year-old Frances Benjamin Johnston, a non-Catholic and later a leading American photographer, enrolled at the Collegiate Institute in 1882 and received her major mistress of English literature degree in June 1884. Her biographer
attests that while at the school, “Johnston was examined on a wide range of subjects” but never took a course in religion.⁵⁶ Even so, the school’s intensely Catholic atmosphere occasionally disturbed some Protestant parents. In 1887, a Methodist family withdrew their daughter from the school because they felt she “had been unduly influenced to become a Catholic.” While administrators denied the charge, the annalist allowed privately that “some of the Sisters had probably been too persistent in speaking upon religious questions and points of doctrine.”⁵⁷

Whatever students’ religious backgrounds, all were held to the same strict behavioral and sartorial standards. The American public and popular press, secular and ecclesiastical, held long-established views regarding proper female decorum and dress. During the 1870s, students at the institute wore black dresses or black skirts and blouses. The only accessories permitted were a brooch and simple earrings. Rules of student conduct were quasi-conventual, with outside visitors restricted and visits monitored.⁵⁸ Every Sunday evening, Directress Wegman presided over an all-school assembly, called “Judgments” by students. After a few opening remarks, she read aloud the names of students whom faculty had observed violating rules of social etiquette as well as school regulations during the preceding week. Students, who knew that Wegman would not mention major moral failings during Judgments, did not fear public shaming on serious matters, which were dealt with privately. For the most part, they enjoyed her inimitable descriptions of the social gaffes of their comrades. A student described a typical 1874 Judgment: “When she commences with her ‘all those who’ etc. ‘stand up,’ one rapidly reviewed the week and according to how guilty they might have felt, they knew whether they would be one of the ‘stand uppers’ or placidly enjoy the evening. After all, whether one stood up or not, it was an adventure.”⁵⁹ As another put it, “We called it Judgement [sic], but few of us feared it.”⁶⁰

From Collegiate Institute to College

The order’s leaders in the United States had learned some hard lessons from the conflict that had ultimately overwhelmed Ildephonsa Wegman. The newly appointed superior of the eastern province, Mother Theophila Bauer, relocated the motherhouse from Aisquith Street in downtown Baltimore to the new Collegiate Institute campus on North Charles Street.⁶¹ In 1877, as president of the order’s corporation (its board of trustees) and de facto president of the school, Bauer appointed one of the teachers, thirty-year-old Sister Mary Meletia Foley (figure 2), to replace the recently departed Ildephonsa
Figure 2. Meletia Foley as a normal school student. Photo from NDMA.
CHAPTER 1

Wegman as directress of studies. Foley (1847–1917), from Wauwatosa, Wisconsin Territory, was the tenth of twelve children born to Irish immigrant farmers. After graduating from Saint Mary’s [Collegiate] Institute in Milwaukee, founded by Mother Caroline Friess, she joined the order in 1868. She taught for two years at the Institute of Notre Dame on Aisquith Street before joining the Collegiate Institute faculty on North Charles Street in 1873.

The Collegiate Institute in the 1880s

Theophila Bauer and Meletia Foley strove to develop the school’s program and campus according to the professional values they had shared with Ildephonse Wegman. To enable Foley to work effectively, Bauer released her from some obligatory community duties in the convent horarium, an exceptional privilege that continued when she was appointed dean of the college in 1895. As a result, one of her successors remembered, “on the whole, the [religious] Community saw little of Sister during the school year.” Her relative distance from the local community did not diminish her effectiveness, however. Well-liked and more politically astute than her predecessor, Meletia Foley proved to be an effective directress who concentrated on building a school that fulfilled the order’s mission to girls: “The system of education pursued is designed to develop the mental, moral, and physical powers of the pupils; to make them refined, accomplished, and useful members of society.” The fact that Mother Theophila Bauer collaborated closely with Foley on school matters and approved of her ecumenical ethos and independent spirit discouraged open criticism by sister-faculty of her leadership style or her “too worldly” professional aspirations for students.

In an era when Catholic and Protestant educators rarely interacted, the sisters resolutely pursued ways to forge ties with mainstream educators. The school’s proximity to several universities proved a key benefit. Foley’s relations with Johns Hopkins administrators and faculty were extraordinarily cordial in the 1870s–90s. Baltimore marveled when Johns Hopkins president Daniel Coit Gilman addressed the Collegiate Institute’s graduating class in 1890. According to the Baltimore Sun, it was “the first time known in which anyone but a Catholic clergyman has been invited to speak at this or any kindred institution in charge of a religious society of that faith.” Certainly it was a rare event for that period in the United States. Gilman gracefully praised the historic role played by female religious orders in the education of women. Although he emphasized that “the whole duties of women were in a different sphere from that of men,” he acknowledged that “many ladies,
by means of their pen, had acquired fame, and examples were not wanting where females had governed kingdoms with marked ability.”

By 1876, with the debt on the Collegiate Institute building still very high at $268,700, concerned Munich superiors had instructed Friess to “sell the whole property . . . for the price the debt came to.” Friess, who strongly opposed boarding institutes, moved quickly. The Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had expressed an interest in purchasing the property, but Archbishop of Baltimore James Roosevelt Bayley refused to allow this particular order to work in his archdiocese. With no other immediate offers, Friess halted her efforts to sell the property. But she did not give up hope that another opportunity would soon materialize. Her 1884 response to Baltimore provincial superior Theophila Bauer’s proposal to expand the Collegiate Institute was unequivocal: “I have read your plan. It sounds very inviting; however, it is not acceptable. Dear Sister Theophila, now no more boarding schools. . . . Institutes are connected with great outlays of money and need special personnel. Parish schools are more necessary, more serviceable, and the principal work of our congregation. . . . Institutes of today do not conform at all to our work.”

Laudatory remarks from James Cardinal Gibbons about the flourishing Collegiate Institute did not impress Friess much, since he never offered any financial support. “It gives me great joy that the Cardinal has praised your Institute,” she told Bauer tartly, “but the good man should also present you with a beautiful gift.” As long as there was a large debt on the school, Mother Theophila Bauer and Sister Meletia Foley knew that Friess would not allow them to proceed with their plans for a college. Despite Bauer’s success in reducing the debt, Friess longed to see the school sold or diverted to other uses. In late 1890, when Cardinal Gibbons informed her that the Religious of the Sacred Heart had again expressed interest in establishing a girls’ school near Baltimore, she thought she saw an opportunity. “The thought occurred to me that the Sacred Heart Madames might perhaps buy Govanstown,” she wrote to Mother General Margaret of Cortona Wiedemann. Gibbons, unlike his predecessor Bayley, favored this order. He intimated to Friess that he would prefer the Sacred Heart sisters, known for their elite boarding schools for girls, to the School Sisters of Notre Dame. “The Cardinal is in no hurry whatsoever to call for the Madames,” Friess relayed to Wiedemann, “but he does think that the taking on of parochial schools would be more agreeable and fitting for us than the maintenance of a first-class Institute.” But the idea of selling the school was sure to arouse vehement opposition among the Baltimore Sisters, and by this time the debt
on the property was a manageable $60,000, so she admitted to Wiedemann that after all, “I suppose we will have to keep the Institute”—which at this point was well down the road to becoming a college.69

Women’s Higher Education in the United States

The College of Notre Dame was founded against the backdrop of the late nineteenth-century development of Protestant-backed colleges for women, as well as the admitting of women to coeducational land-grant universities and a few radical liberal arts colleges. Many mainstream college leaders agreed with the Catholic hierarchy’s opposition to coeducation. In his 1876 inaugural address at Johns Hopkins University, President Daniel Coit Gilman looked forward to the day when “someone” would establish in Baltimore a female institution like Oxford’s Girton Hall. It could “avail itself of the advantages of the Peabody and Hopkins foundations, without obliging the pupils to give up the advantages of a home, or exposing them to the rougher influences . . . still to be found in colleges and universities where young men resort.”70 A decade later, Gilman applauded the recent founding of the Woman’s College of Baltimore as “an adequate answer to any suggestion that the University’s undergraduate courses should be opened to women students.”71

In the 1890s, the leaders of US men’s colleges and universities, including those supportive of higher education for women, believed that college curricula for both men and women should reflect the fundamentally different roles played by the sexes in home and society. Founders and faculties of elite women’s colleges, who strongly disagreed, modeled their curricula on those of elite men’s colleges. At Radcliffe College’s 1894 commencement, Harvard president Charles W. Eliot predicted that gender-specific curricula would ultimately prevail: “During the last twenty-five years the education of women has been made to resemble as closely as possible the education of men. The standards have been the same. . . . But I think this is only a temporary condition of affairs. It seems altogether probable that the education of women will ultimately differ widely from that of men.”72

Since the 1870s, Mother Theophila Bauer, Directress Meletia Foley, and the Collegiate Institute faculty had closely followed the development of curricula, academic policies, and social regulations adopted by eastern women’s colleges. The 1885 establishment of the Woman’s College of Baltimore City (later Goucher College) under the auspices of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the 1889 foundation of the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, reinforced the sisters’ conviction
that there was a pressing need for a Catholic female college. Protestant
denominations had founded numerous women’s colleges by the 1890s, but
the Catholic Church supported only colleges for men.

The historian Kathleen Sprows Cummings suggests that for an order with
a local academy, opening a college in a gradual way was hardly a major event.
She supports her view by noting that “in 1895, the School Sisters of Notre
Dame turned their Baltimore Institute into the College of Notre Dame with-
out fanfare or celebration. The Chronicle, a record of the institute, did not even
mention the transition until September 1897, two years after the first college
students had been admitted.” However, the relative lack of pomp did not
mean that the founding of the college was routine. In the 1870s and 1880s,
Bauer and Foley faced critical challenges from their superiors to the idea of
opening a college. But as one alumna, a historian of the college, later wrote,
“the founding of Catholic University galvanized Sister Meletia. If Catholic
women were to do graduate work there, they must first have a Catholic col-
lege from which to get degrees. . . . [She] said, logically, why not begin one
at Notre Dame . . . [which] had a preparatory school—the Academy—which
could produce students ready for college work.”

The idea of establishing a college faced a number of hurdles, both within
and outside the order. Bauer and Foley realized they could not count on major
lay donors; wealthy Catholics preferred to support the church’s charitable
works rather than endow colleges and seminaries. Appeals in the 1880s on
behalf of the new Catholic University had been discouraging, and there was
little enthusiasm among bishops for a proposed nationwide diocesan collec-
tion to benefit that institution. The Baltimore sisters recognized that with a
small initial enrollment, tuition revenues would not cover operating expenses.
They would have to rely on the order and a few benefactors for funds to
acquire property, erect buildings, and hire lay faculty. The order would also
have to contribute the services of sisters as faculty and administrators. Some
sisters had deep reservations about the project. After all, the order had only
recently paid off the large debt incurred in the 1870s to establish the Col-
legiate Institute. However, most agreed that the cause was compelling. This
bridge crossed, the next step was gaining the approval of the hierarchy.

While over 70 percent of late-nineteenth-century US colleges were coed-
ucational, the Catholic Church disapproved of the practice at the college
level. Although in 1889, the US bishops had founded the Catholic University
of America in Washington, DC, as a graduate institution for clerics, by 1895 it
was admitting male lay students to its school of philosophy, graduate school
of arts and sciences, and engineering and architectural school. University
trustees restricted enrollment to men despite a faculty proposal that women
be accepted. Denied admission to Catholic colleges, women were enrolling in rising numbers not only in public institutions and normal schools but also in Protestant-affiliated women’s colleges. It was the latter trend, rather than any strong commitment to the intellectual and social advancement of women, that led the national hierarchy to approve the establishment of Catholic women’s colleges. By the 1890s the success of the Seven Sisters, and their public endorsement and financial support by prominent male citizens, had made the question of women’s higher education reasonable, albeit somewhat unpalatable, to Catholic Church officials. Social-class goals within the Catholic community were rising, and Catholic women’s colleges promised to tie middle- and upper-class parishioners more closely to the church.

With official church approbation, women religious had been addressing pressing social and educational needs in the United States since the late eighteenth century. Sisterhoods established and owned many tuition academies for girls and staffed most Catholic elementary and secondary schools owned by parishes and dioceses. The permanent nature and formal structure of female religious communities gave their members critical visibility and status within the Catholic community. Their collective labor and material resources enabled them to initiate and implement large-scale projects that were beyond the means of most individual laity. Nuns enabled an immigrant working-class church to finance the immense Catholic educational and benevolent enterprise that developed across the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the same time, since schoolteaching, nursing, child care, and social work were “women’s work,” sisters posed little threat to church and societal norms or male hegemony.

But although they were ultimately successful, sisters across the country had to contend with significant episcopal skepticism about their higher-education project. When the College of Notre Dame opened in Baltimore in 1895 as an outgrowth of the Collegiate Institute, the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame became the first group to confront the male monopoly over the church’s higher-education sector by opening a college for women. Over time, many other women’s communities took it as their mission to establish and support similar institutions. The authority of bishops extended to all Catholic institutions within their dioceses. Women’s colleges in the relatively few dioceses headed by liberal bishops had a major advantage over institutions located in dioceses governed by conservatives. The College of Saint Catherine in Saint Paul, Minnesota, established in 1905 by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet, is a notable example. The brother of Mother Seraphine Ireland (1842–1930), provincial superior of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet, was Archbishop John Ireland (1838–1918), a liberal church leader.
who governed the archdiocese of Saint Paul from the 1880s until his death. He encouraged his sister and her community to open a local women’s college, and his critical support, moral and financial, allowed the College of Saint Catherine to experience consistent growth. Women’s colleges situated in other dioceses typically faced greater challenges.  

Two-thirds of the American hierarchy in the early 1900s were either Irish born or of Irish parentage. Many of these men, as historian Maryann Valiulis writes, shared the view of their counterparts in Ireland that “any attempt by women to leave their domestic confines would wreak havoc not only on the home but on the nation as well.” “The great Doctors of the Church affirm unanimously the inferiority of women in the intellectual order,” proclaimed Michael O’Kane, OP, of Limerick in 1913. He explained that this “arises from the role nature has destined her to fulfill in the drama of life.”  

His contemporary, the theologian Rev. David Barry, stressed that “woman suffrage is incompatible with the Catholic ideal of the unity of domestic life.” Leading US church journals like the Catholic World duly reported on prevailing Irish perspectives on the woman question.  

Founders and sister-presidents of the first female colleges in the United States, some of Irish birth themselves, faced considerable skepticism from the hierarchy. Among women’s colleges founded before 1920, Irish-born nuns headed Trinity College (Washington, DC), the College of Saint Catherine (Minnesota), the College of Saint Angela (New Rochelle, New York), and Marymount College (New York). Despite the German origins of her order, Meletia Foley, founder of the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, was of Irish parentage.  

Irish influence significantly affected the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the College of Notre Dame, since for over seven decades (1877–1947) only two bishops, both raised in Ireland, governed the Baltimore archdiocese. James Cardinal Gibbons, born in Baltimore, was raised in Ireland until age nineteen. His successor, the Irish-born archbishop Michael Curley, arrived in the United States as a twenty-five-year-old priest. Gibbons, as archbishop of Baltimore, was the first chancellor of the Catholic University of America. (Washington, DC was within the territory of the Archdiocese of Baltimore until 1939.) His staff included the university’s first rector, Bishop John J. Keane (1886–96), and his successors, Rev. Thomas J. Conaty, rector, and Rev. Philip J. Garrigan, vice rector, all of Irish heritage.  

From his 1877 arrival in Baltimore (the same year as Meletia Foley’s appointment as directress), the sisters at the Collegiate Institute endeavored to gain Gibbons’s personal interest in the school. He visited the campus frequently to address the students, host visiting dignitaries, and benefit from the expertise
CHAPTER 1

of sisters who edited his rough drafts of sermons, articles, and books. The sisters took these opportunities to acquaint him with their ideas about the need for a women’s college in his archdiocese. Foley and Bauer also discussed their ideas for a women’s college not only with the Collegiate Institute’s full-time faculty but also with its cadre of visiting lecturers from local universities. The enthusiasm of mainstream Baltimore educators for a Catholic women’s college helped the sisters gain episcopal approval to proceed with the project. The backing of prominent local intellectuals impressed Cardinal Gibbons as well as the order’s Munich generalate, although Meletia Foley’s strong feminist views continued to confound local clergy: “She maintained that nations were no better than their women and that nations occupy their place in the world, the nations of moral culture and goodness, on account of the virtue and character of their women and particularly of their educated women,” remembered Monsignor Patrick C. Gavan, chancellor of the archdiocese from 1902 to 1914, who regularly dealt with Foley. “Woman, and not man, is the strong moral power in the world.”

Immediately prior to the founding of the College of Notre Dame, and independent of each other, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart and the Sisters of the Holy Cross had briefly contemplated establishing a “coordinate” college for women in Washington, DC, near the new Catholic University. While university trustees did not oppose the coordinate model, the apostolic delegate viewed it as too much like coeducation. In contrast, when the School Sisters of Notre Dame proposed to open a women’s college in Baltimore, safely removed from the Catholic University campus, they gained ecclesiastical approval. The Collegiate Institute of Notre Dame of Maryland, founded in 1873, had operated under an 1864 charter granted by the Maryland legislature “for educational purposes” to its owners, the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. (The Institute of Notre Dame on Aisquith Street also operated under this charter.) Now the order applied to the General Assembly of Maryland for a college charter. On April 2, 1896, the 1864 charter was “amended and powers of corporation enlarged” to grant power to the faculty to award bachelor’s degrees in the arts and sciences, literature, and music. The amended charter also provided that the college could grant master’s and doctor’s degrees. Sister Meletia Foley became the college’s first dean.

The Collegiate Institute’s June 1895 commencement centered entirely on the new college, the first of its kind in the United States, that was to open in September. Students composed and staged “Wisdom’s Daughters,” an allegory that expressed their intense pride in this radical undertaking. Attired in caps, gowns, and ribbon bows in the colors of ten “prominent
educational institutions of the country,” the young actresses testified in turn before Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, and her attendants, Science and Virtue, to the merits of the female institutions they represented, among them Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Vassar, and the Harvard Annex. A paean to the newly founded College of Notre Dame of Maryland concluded the performance: “All united in a final chorus, the theme being the growth of Notre Dame, which, without the foundations and endowments of its more favored sisters, has won for itself enviable reputation in the domain of higher education.”

Students in the Collegiate Institute’s senior department who were to enroll in the “college class” in September 1895 received freshman-level college credits for courses they had taken during their final year at the institute. In June 1896, the institute awarded its last diplomas, discontinued its “old degrees,” and became Notre Dame of Maryland Preparatory School. In recognition of their special status, members of the college class attended the final ceremonies as observers only, and as college freshmen they celebrated with a Class Day, replete, as one student recalled, with the “stupendous innovation” of an all-female evening dance. Over the next three years, the college added sophomore, junior, and senior classes. The North Charles Street campus now comprised a four-year college, a preparatory high school, and a lower school with primary and grammar departments.

On Wednesday, June 14, 1899, James Cardinal Gibbons conferred four bachelor of arts degrees and two bachelor of literature degrees on six young women, the first of their sex to earn bachelor’s degrees from a Catholic college in the United States (figure 3). Charles Joseph Bonaparte (1851–1921), grandnephew of Napoleon and a prominent Catholic layman, delivered the college’s first commencement address, titled “The Significance of the Bachelor’s Degree.” He began, “Today and here for the first time in America, a Catholic college for the education of young ladies bestows the bachelor’s degree.” A graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, and a trustee of the Catholic University, Bonaparte, like his friend Cardinal Gibbons, held conservative views on “women’s place” and female suffrage. Following the commencement ceremony, Gibbons hosted “a lunch for the fathers of the graduates,” a spectacle of male solidarity that persisted until 1918. In reporting this event the following day, the local Morning Herald congratulated the College of Notre Dame for being “in line with an innovation as usual,” and for setting a precedent that would soon “be taken up all over the country.” A year later, it pronounced the college’s academic program to be “as thorough and comprehensive as is offered to men in the best colleges of the country.”
The careers of the pioneer graduates bear out the *Herald’s* statement. Three of them, class valedictorian and Andover, Massachusetts, native Mary Teresa Curran (m. Murphy), BLitt, along with Baltimore sisters Ellen R. Coll, BA, and Catherine W. Coll (m. Crumlish), BA, did not enter the labor force. But Dorothea Kilkoff (m. Butler), BA, a native of Deland, Florida, studied organ at Stetson University before undertaking a thirty-year career in government service. Helen Burr, BA, from Lincoln, Nebraska, studied at the Detroit Institute of Musical Arts and later headed its Harp Department. During her professional career as a performer, composer, and teacher, she played with the Women’s String Orchestra of New York, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Endorsed by the celebrated harpist Carlos Salzedo, she opened a Detroit studio where she offered lessons on the harp for many years. Louise Power, BLitt, from San Francisco, entered the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1902. As Sister Mary Loyola, she earned an MA in French from Saint John’s University, and taught in her order’s schools. In 1939, while a French professor at Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, she and Sister Marie Philip, CSJ,
a French professor at the College of Saint Catherine in Saint Paul, in an effort to revitalize modern literature through “the culture of Christian civilization,” cofounded the Catholic Renascence Society. Yet despite its successful beginning, publicity for the new College of Notre Dame was not sustained temporally or geographically. The young college immediately faced a significant challenge as episcopal statements regarding Trinity College’s imminent opening captured the attention of both the secular and Catholic press.

A New Catholic Women’s College: Trinity

Female college graduates had immediately tested the Catholic University of America’s male-only policy; about twenty applied yearly for admission to the university’s graduate programs beginning in the mid-1890s. The university’s chancellor, Cardinal Gibbons, and his clerical board of trustees found themselves under escalating national criticism for barring Catholic women from the university. At this time, Gibbons received an application from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, a well-known teaching order, to establish a girls’ preparatory high school within his archdiocese in the Washington area. Joined by Catholic University’s rector, Thomas Conaty, and vice rector Philip Garrigan, Gibbons proposed that the sisters instead establish a women’s college. Gibbons admitted to Mother Julia McGroarty, SND, the superior of the order, that he and his fellow university officers would benefit directly from the presence of a female college near the university: “Such an institution . . . in the shadow of our great University, will, I am convinced, offer educational opportunities to our young women, which cannot be found elsewhere in the country. It will relieve the University authorities from the embarrassment of refusing women admission, many of whom have already applied for the privilege of following our courses.” The Kentucky Irish American went further. Trinity College, it declared, would become “the first American Catholic institution to recognize the right of women to higher education.”

Conservative opponents, clerical and lay, turned on the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. “We did not desire nor seek the work,” Mother Julia, the provincial superior, reminded Sister Mary Euphrasia, superior of the order’s Washington convent. “Anyone can see we are only the figure-head.” Complaints against Gibbons and his supporters flowed to church officials in Rome. Critics took Gibbons’s comment that Trinity graduates might someday enroll in the Catholic University graduate school as proof that he endorsed coeducation. To a query from Cardinal Francesco Satolli, prefect of studies in Rome, about the proposed “new female school of higher studies,”
Gibbons replied that coeducation was a nonissue and that other criticisms of
the project were “the offspring of ignorance or malice.” He also reassured
Archbishop Sebastiano Martinelli, the Vatican’s apostolic delegate in Wash-
ington, DC, that the Trinity project would greatly benefit the church in the
United States by dissuading young parishioners from “frequent[ing] Vassar
and other anti-Catholic colleges for the study of those higher branches which
are not taught in our Catholic academies.”108

In September 1897, given distorted press accounts about plans for the col-
lege, “those immediately concerned,” notably “his Eminence the Cardinal-
Archbishop of Baltimore and chancellor of the university,” approved “an
authoritative statement” on the project: “It has been decided to establish in
Washington a women’s college of the same grade as Vassar, thus giving young
women an opportunity for the highest collegiate instruction. . . . It is to be a
post-graduate school, and no preparatory department is to be connected with
it.” Conaty praised the intellectual competence of the Sisters of Notre Dame
de Namur and pledged to cooperate with them in everything “consistent with
the interests of the university.”109

Gibbons, the dean of the national hierarchy, was ardently behind the
Trinity project, and most of his fellow bishops used their influential pulpits
and the church press to advance the great cause. Having a female Catho-
lic college in the nation’s capital would greatly boost the reputation of the
Catholic Church across the country, they informed their parishioners. New
York’s auxiliary bishop, John Farley, was typical. In an 1899 New York Herald
press release, he asked, “Why not establish here in our capital at Washington
an institution of learning that will be the admiration of the whole country,
Catholic and non-Catholic?” Church newspapers covered the college’s con-
struction in great detail and pressed wealthy Catholics to provide the means
to ensure that in funding and status it would rival leading Protestant female
colleges. The April 30, 1899, edition of the San Francisco Call announced that
Trinity would be to Catholic University “what Barnard College is to Colum-
bia University and Radcliffe College to Harvard University.”110

News that a second Catholic women’s college was to open within the Bal-
timore archdiocese came as a rude jolt to trustees and faculty at the College
of Notre Dame of Maryland. In June 1897, the New York Times announced
that Trinity College was to be “the first Catholic college for women in this
country.”111 To the distress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, in the same
year, their local newspaper, the Baltimore Sun, wrote that “there exists at
present no institution under Catholic auspices for the higher education of
women.”112 In conversation with one of Trinity’s leading planners, Sister
Mary Euphrasia Taylor, SND, Cardinal Gibbons referred to Notre Dame as
a “Normal School at Govanstown, Maryland,” whose students he “would gladly see” enroll at Trinity. He reassured Taylor that he “anticipated no rival College, of the same plane [as Trinity], coming into existence; in the distant future, in Chicago, perhaps, there might arise a College similar.” Yet at the same time, he advised Trinity sisters to visit the College of Notre Dame as well as other eastern women’s colleges. “Mother Julia [McGroarty] and two Sisters of Notre Dame of Namur called and went through the building,” the Notre Dame annalist recorded in July. “They are looking over schools prior to finishing Trinity College.” Trinity College opened in the fall of 1900 with eleven regular freshmen, nine special students, and two auditors. Within four years, boosted by Gibbons’s support and national publicity, it enrolled eighty-one students.

For the SSNDs, the situation was a painful introduction to church politics. As Catholic University chancellor, Gibbons wanted to defuse the mounting debate over the institution’s all-male admissions policy. He saw a solution in the speedy establishment of Trinity College. As a member of Trinity’s board of trustees from 1898 until his death in 1921, he used his sweeping national influence, ecclesiastical and political, to advance its enrollment, financial condition, and academic programs. Cardinal Gibbons had given the School Sisters of Notre Dame permission to open a women’s college within the Baltimore archdiocese, a prerequisite for opening any church-related institution. Beyond that, his support for the enterprise was minimal. He did not sign a formal legal document witnessing to his approval, and the founding sisters were reluctant to press him for such tangible confirmation. Although a perception lingers among historians that Cardinal Gibbons was one of Notre Dame’s major patrons, in fact his sole recorded gift to the college was an autographed photograph of himself, presented on December 6, 1896. He did not publicly acknowledge the College of Notre Dame as the United States’ first Catholic women’s college, instead referring to it as a collegiate institute or a normal school. At the dedication of College Hall in 1910, he spoke of it only as part of Notre Dame of Maryland, “an ideal school for girls, from kindergarten through College.”

As a result of episcopal strategy, the College of Notre Dame of Maryland did not benefit from the momentum that typically accompanies being “first.” Following Gibbons’s lead, the US hierarchy paid the Baltimore college little attention. Instead, bishops used their influence to promote Trinity College. Proceeds from a widely advertised fundraising lecture by Bishop John Lancaster Spalding of Peoria, Illinois, in January 1899 drew national attention and considerable funds to the institution. In December 1899, six months after the College of Notre Dame had graduated its pioneer class,
the Catholic Club in New York City held a major fundraiser for the planned Trinity College. The event’s invitational leaflet noted that while women’s colleges were spreading nationally, “there is no such institution for Catholic women”—their only options were “Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, Barnard, Wellesley, Smith or some other well-known women’s college not conducted under Catholic auspices.” The Catholic University Bulletin, reporting on Trinity’s solemn dedication in November 1900, again stressed its pride of place: “Hitherto the Catholic Church possessed many excellent schools and academies for the education of young women. There was none, however, that had for its formal aim a post-graduate course of studies and training.”

No one in Baltimore publicly criticized Gibbons and his supporters, but there was considerable private sentiment that these men had done the sisters at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland an injustice. “This is written in no spirit of hostility to Trinity College,” remarked Rev. Lucian Johnston. “At the same time it is only fair to give due praise to the solid work in collegiate training which has been done for a long while & is now being done by the progressive community in charge of Notre Dame.” Publicity about Trinity’s progress rendered the College of Notre Dame nearly invisible within the Catholic community. With virtually no press coverage, it was difficult to recruit students nationally. In 1898 Austin O’Malley, MD, an English instructor at Notre Dame University in Indiana, completely ignored the College of Notre Dame in his widely circulated Catholic World article “College Work for Catholic Girls.” When the Baltimore sisters protested the omission, he replied curtly that he had never heard of the college until “after the article was published.”

Yet as we have seen, women’s struggle to extend gender agency within the Catholic Church in the United States began with the establishment of the College of Notre Dame. The School Sisters of Notre Dame had crossed a historic line when they defied a conservative tradition to open it. Catholic higher education, until now a prestigious male enclave, had a new, and troubling, gender dimension. In their development, the College of Notre Dame and similar colleges of later foundation were to face some exceptional hurdles. Their efforts at financing and staffing their colleges in the midst of the changing social, financial, religious, and educational environment in the first half of the twentieth century are the subject of the next chapter.