

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The Belles of St. Mary's:  
A New Kind of Education for Southern Women  
In the 1850s

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What soft, sweet voices these Southern girls have, and what marked proprieties of dress you must observe among them; also how modest their bearing, and the absence of anything like boisterous or bantering demeanor. Not a single touch or taint of a hoyden among them all. Of home refinement and delicacy of the old plantation life, what living and loving epistles are these Southern girls! How proud is their old bishop (Atkinson) of them all - his dear children, most of whom he has confirmed - you may see, as his loving eye lights up with admiration of those three lovely, tidewater girls who glide along over the stage to their places at the piano, harp and guitar! What poetry of motion in the carriage and walk of the ante-bellum Southern girls in those blessed days when the young men did not part their hair in the middle, and when no bicycles had ruined the grace of woman's attractive movement. How broad and full the course of study in this school, the admirable essays, read so modestly and effectively by the young ladies, set forth, as the noble face of Dr. Smedes lights up with pleasure at some singularly fine sentence in her salutatory falling from the lips of that fair graduate from Georgia; or as further on in the exercises the valedictorian moves many of a large audience to tears when with faltering voice she says farewell to dear old St. Mary's forever.<sup>1</sup>

The young women of St. Mary's were the pinnacle of Southern perfection to this reflective observer. When James Avirett made these observations, he recognized that the girls of St. Mary's possessed many fine accomplishments that made them more than just physical beauties. They were charming, modest, accomplished, intelligent and held themselves with dignity. They were the result of a new set of standards for women's education in the South. Founded in 1842 by Albert Smedes, St. Mary's became one of the most popular places for the wealthy and affluent of the South to send their daughters. The instruction the girls received at St. Mary's, just as the writer mentioned, included both a broad and full course of study, as well as an education in social graces and religious virtue. St. Mary's did not merely educate its girls; it raised them into ideal Southern women.

<sup>1</sup> James Battle Avirett, *The Old Plantation: How We Lived in Great House and Cabin Before the War* (New York: 1901), Documenting the American South, 1998, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/avirett/avirett.html> (accessed September 28, 2007).

In 1857, fifteen years after the school was founded, John Kimberly packed his two young daughters, Emma and Lizzie, off to St. Mary's while he taught at UNC Chapel Hill. While at school the girls studied a rigorous course of academics that nearly could have rivaled the curriculum taught at boys' schools at the time. They formed important friendships and connections with the daughters of other southern elite that would benefit them in the future. They were given ample tutelage in the Christian values necessary for a virtuous Southern woman. All this was watched over by the family-like faculty and headmaster of St Mary's. John Kimberly wanted all this for Emma and *Lizzie* when he sent them off to school, and the letters and other material surrounding their experiences at St. Mary's show how each element of their education was carefully attended to, as well as the positive impact it had on them.

The schooling received at St. Mary's was demonstrative of the developing requirements for a proper young lady's education. Girls were not educated simply to be intellectual nor were they merely educated to perform the domestic duties of wives and mothers. They were educated to be complete persons; socially functional, mentally independent, responsible in regards to their families, as well as pious and virtuous citizens. This new schooling required a new learning environment and subject matter. Girls needed a broader education on a variety of humanistic and scientific subjects, they needed to learn to form healthy relationships with their peers, they needed parents and teachers who could guide them academically and morally and see to it that their emotional needs were fulfilled while at school. In response the girls developed a love of learning and a desire to constantly improve themselves as persons.

The elite of the United States in the 1850s needed to find a way to reconcile republican virtue and equality with its system of social rank. Only a virtuous and educated citizenry could continue to resist the dangers of a tyrannical government but at the same time education needed to be a sign that separated the wealthy from the masses.

Enlightenment values had begun to necessitate the admittance of greater equality of gender and race. In her essay, "Morals, Manners and the Republican Mother," Rosemarie Zaggari explained how Americans were influenced by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, and how this influence resulted in a renewed and reexamined interest in education for women.<sup>2</sup> Women needed to be educated so that they could function as informed citizens within the republic. As the mothers of children, women were seen as the primary educators of future generations of citizens. Zaggari's essay contrasted the work of another scholar, Linda K. Kerber, who in her essay "The Inheritance of the Enlightenment"<sup>3</sup> explained how the ideas of philosophers including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Montesquieu, Condorcet, and Rousseau as well as others influenced patriots but did little to alter the ideology surrounding men's roles in the public and their right to a broad education. Even if Enlightenment ideas did not directly relate the coming expansion in women's roles it did serve to form at least some minor basis for these changes.

These Enlightenment ideas helped to form the basis for the creation of republican motherhood. Linda Kerber wrote that:

<sup>2</sup> Rosemarie Zaggari, "Morals, Manners and the Republican Mother," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2. (Jun., 1992), pp. 192-215.

<sup>3</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 15-32.

The Republican Mother's life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue; she educated her sons for it; she condemned and corrected her husband's lapses from it. If...the stability of the nation rested on the persistence of virtue among its citizens, then the creation of virtuous citizens was dependent on the presence of wives and mothers who were well informed, "properly methodical," and free of "invidious and rancorous passions."<sup>4</sup>

As Republican mothers, women were expected to maintain the virtue of the republic.

Women needed to fill a role that was not entirely confined to the domestic sphere, the reverberations of their actions would be felt within the nation as a whole. Mary Kelley pointed out that it was not that women were becoming equals, but rather "Women's voices should be heard, not because as members of their nation's citizenry they had the same rights and obligations as men, but because as women they set 'a purer higher and more excellent example.'"<sup>5</sup>

The South itself was a unique case, in the North a variety of humanistic movements came to be as people from all walks of life pushed for social change. In the South the pace of change was slower and its degree was less intense, but change existed none the less. In her book, *Within the Plantation Household*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese wrote that:

Education underscores the difference between Southern women and women throughout the rest of the country. In the late eighteenth century, Northern bourgeois and, in lesser measure, Southern slaveholders discovered the virtues of education women to meet their responsibilities as republican mothers. But whereas in the South, that elite tradition long continued to dominate prevailing attitudes towards women's education, in the North it was rapidly supplemented by a practical commitment to educating young women for careers...

<sup>4</sup> Linda K Kerber, *Towards an Intellectual History of Women: Essays by Linda K. Kerber* (Chapel Hill: university of North Carolina Press, 1997) 58-59.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) 53.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 46.

In the North women were being educated to take their place in the industrialized working force, but the South still required a special motivation of education. Anya Jabour investigated the unique southern situation surrounding one antebellum family's decisions regarding their daughters' educations in her essay, "Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated: Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family."<sup>7</sup> Jabour shows how the parents in this case invested a great deal of time and concern over their daughters' educations. They had to find a balance between what they found to be an in depth and thorough education that, at the same time, would not spoil their girls' chances for marriage and happiness within Southern society. Jabour also demonstrated how Southern education differed from Northern; "While northerners perceived classical education and domestic training as compatible and even complimentary, several studies suggest that southerners in the 1830s had little faith in the efficacy of educating women." Instead of educating women for practical reasons Southern women were educated to create another basis on which to maintain social hierarchy. Mary Kelley wrote that:

Readily identifiable signifiers of privilege became all the more important to a post-Revolutionary elite struggle to preserve the legitimacy of a rank-ordered society. A privileged daughter's education, including her command of social accomplishments, was deeply imbricated in this contestation.

The things that made education in the South unique are some of the things that St. Mary's especially catered to; the important balance between enough education and over education, as well as the need to preserve social hierarchy.

St. Mary's School for Girls was founded in 1842 by Albert Smedes. The school buildings were originally built to serve as an Episcopalian boys school that would have

<sup>7</sup> Anya Jabour, "Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated: Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 64, No. 1. (Feb., 1998) 23-64.

<sup>8</sup> Jabour, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Kelley, 69.

helped to increase the influence of the Episcopalian church in the South, however the school failed. After the failure, desiring to not have the buildings go to waste, Bishop Levi Sillman Ives struck on the excellent idea of turning it into a fine ladies boarding school. The school would fill a growing demand for appropriate education for the daughters of the Southern elite. One of the original thirteen girls that first attended St Mary's recalled that, "Eighteen forty-two was a promising year to be opening a school for girls, for there was great interest in education, especially in 'female education.'"<sup>10</sup> People, particularly the wealthy, had begun to desire a more in depth and challenging curriculum for women, one that could not be gotten at home. At the same time, they wished to preserve and protect the feminine virtue so highly prized in the South.

In order to lead this school, a charismatic and passionate preacher, Albert Smedes was employed. "He was a man uniquely fitted by training, experience, and philosophy to head a school for girls that could operate within the framework of southern tradition without embracing entirely southern provincialism." Smedes believed strongly in the education of women so that they could fulfill their role in society. He believed that a woman must be a mother and wife, as well as an active participant in the church and a teacher within the community.

John Kimberly was not a native Southerner. He migrated South in order to take up a position as a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His wife had died some years ago at the birth of his second daughter Emma, and as a result he could not depend on her to provide for the girls' educations. A teacher himself, Kimberly placed value in a good education and wanted to insure that his daughters would grow into

<sup>10</sup> Martha Stoops, *The Heritage: The Education of Women at St. Mary's College, Raleigh, North Carolina 1842-1982* (Raleigh: St. Mary's College, 1984), 13. "Stoops, 17.

both well informed citizens and socially acceptable ladies. Conveniently close to where he was posted he found the right type of education at St. Mary's. He was able to hand over Emma and Lizzie's educations with confidence that the requirements for their future success in Southern society would be met. The conditions under which St Mary's was founded, and the headmaster who was appointed to it, all made it an ideal selection for both John Kimberly and other affluent Southerners to send their daughters too. By studying the experiences of the Kimberly family at St Mary's as well as other girls and their families, the understanding of women's education in the antebellum South may be broadened.

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The curriculum at St. Mary's might appear unexpected upon first examination. Traditionally girls had been educated solely for their futures as plantation mistresses. A scholar, Mary Beth Norton described the typical day of a wealthy Southern woman; the day began with supervision that household affairs were going steadily:

After she had ascertained that daily tasks were proceeding as planned, the mistress of the household could spend some time reading or playing music before joining her husband for dinner in early to mid-afternoon. Afterward, she would normally turn to needlework until evening, and then again to reading and writing.<sup>12</sup>

According to this description a girls' education might be limited to reading, writing, needlework and household management. The list of subjects taught at St. Mary's reaches far beyond this narrow scope; Southerners wanted their girls to have an education that distinguished them as elites and ladies they needed more than just bare necessities. The

<sup>12</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980) 26.



potential areas on grading listed Emma and Lizzie's report cards from April, 1857<sup>1</sup> are as follows: Bible, poetry, spelling and defining, reading, writing, geography, history, grammar, mathematics, natural science, moral science, compositions and abstracts, French, Latin, piano, guitar, singing, sewing, chapel, exercise, general department, punctuality, drawing and painting, and disorder marks for the month. Not all of these courses were required, as the basic curriculum included only reading, writing, geography, history, bible, grammar, mathematics, sewing and natural science. Foreign language, dancing, music and art were all secondary courses which parents could elect to enroll their children in for an additional fee.<sup>14</sup> Such courses, which formerly constituted the whole of a girl's education had become merely optional as the scope of female education expanded. The core of St. Mary's curriculum centered on academics and practical skills, rather than on arts. This curriculum was part of what appealed about the school to parents and made it so successful that it is still functioning 150 years later. In addition to the written curricula recorded in the previous monthly report, there was included a variety of extracurricular fieldtrips and concerts which girls were encouraged or required to attend.

Math, science, and geography were an important part of the St. Mary's education. "The course of instruction embraces the studies adapted to the most tender age, as well as those suited to the most advanced stage of school or college education. For the illustration of the Natural Sciences, a full apparatus is provided,"<sup>15</sup> affirmed a description published by St. Mary's in 1859. These subjects were relatively new subjects in the area

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Report for Emma Kimberly*, April, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 8, "John Kimberly Papers #398," Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, (hereinafter cited as SHC.)

<sup>14</sup> *Discipline at St Mary's* (November, 1859), series 1, box 16, item 102, SMS.

<sup>15</sup> *Discipline at St Mary's* (November, 1859), series 1, box 16, item 102, SMS.

of female education, yet they received ample attention at St Mary's. A notebook signed by a Miss Adele Kron included complicated geometric sketches that analyzed angles and distances.<sup>16</sup> In a letter from 1858, Emma Kimberly bemoaned her poor abilities in mathematics, but recognized that she had nonetheless improved in that area.<sup>17</sup> Scientific experiments performed by the faculty and visiting scholars at St. Mary's, were a frequent topic of discussion in the girls' letters, Lizzie wrote; "Mr. Waddell is giving a lecture to the girls now and showing us a great many experiments about the [word illegible] battery the power of electricity and a great many more things[,] I am writing now while he is fixing them." Understanding electricity was not terribly important for the average Southern planter's wife, but these girls were being raised to be more; they were to be wives, mothers and educators of the young. It was important for them to have a broad understanding of how the world worked.

Drawing, art, music, French, dancing and sewing, while perhaps less innovational elements of Southern women's education, were still important to the girls futures as young women. The curriculum and faculty at St. Mary's was developed so that a parent might feel satisfied that his or her daughter was receiving ample instruction in any of these areas which she had been enrolled in.<sup>19</sup> Dr. Smedes took care to insure his school was outfitted with the necessary tools, such as musical instruments and art supplies and accomplished teachers of music, dance and art, to have created this satisfaction in the minds of parents. Of the subjects listed above, the only one that was required was

<sup>16</sup> *School Notebook Containing Geometry Exercises*, Adele Kron, Series 3, Volume V-408/10, "Francis Joseph Kron Papers #408," SHC. See image 1 in index.

<sup>17</sup> Emma Kimberly to John Kimberly, March 20, 1858, series 1, box 2, folder 13, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>18</sup> Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, April 25, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 8, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>19</sup> Emma and Lizzie Kimberly appear to have been enrolled in French, drawing, music and dance at various points in the education at St Mary's.

sewing, this served a practical as well as educational purpose as the girls were able and expected to mend their own clothing.<sup>20</sup> However, girls were welcome to take this subject farther if she or her parents desired to do so. Kate Wyatt wrote to her mother about a sewing society she and some other girls formed, "I don't believe I wrote you about our sewing society. The girls all collect in the drawing room every Saturday after sewing hour, and Miss Cuddy (an old Italian lady) gives us lessons in fancy work."<sup>21</sup> Great excitement centered around the arrival of a new dance teacher in Emma and Lizzie's letters, although their father elected for them not to receive training by this individual. Lizzie seemed to have possessed some ability at drawing, she wrote in a postscript, "I am drawing on bristle board more and have finished five pieces one is a large head it is a little girls head and she is asleep. Miss Paris says she thinks it is prettier than the model, besides I have painted a small piece in water colors, it is two rosebuds and a great many leaves."<sup>22</sup> Each girl was allowed to pursue these subjects at her and her parents' discretion and pace. Other than sewing they were not mandatory, but almost all girls participated in one or another of them, and they became ways for each girl to express her independence and exhibit her personal ability. These traditional subjects of study for women were important skills that would provide them with the social graces necessary to succeed in Southern society.

Dr. Smedes made a personal effort to enrich all parts of the day with opportunities for learning. A student, Jenny wrote to one of her acquaintances, "I was interrupted last night by Mr. Smedes showing some of the stars with the Telescope, Saturn was very

<sup>20</sup> Stoops, 51.

<sup>21</sup> Kate Wyatt to her Mother, February 18, 1860, series 4, box 80, item 760, SMS.

<sup>22</sup> Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, April 20, 1858, series 1, folder 14, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

visible we could see the ring distinctly."<sup>23</sup> The education the girls received at St. Mary's extended beyond the classroom. While the girls at school were very carefully protected, and their lives highly focused around the few acres of grounds at the school, Smedes worked hard to ensure that they benefited fully from their immediate environment and took occasional trips to expand their minds beyond the school grounds. The extracurricular activities the girls engaged in had to be in accord with the prescriptions assigned a lady. Suzanne Lebsock explained in her essay "Female Autonomy and Personalism," that "The activities of even the most prestigious lady remained carefully circumscribed by the conventions ordained for women general."<sup>24</sup> The excursions the girls took from school included a variety of interesting and unexpected destinations for young ladies, but these visits were always carefully tailored to expand their mind without damaging their delicate dispositions.

*Lizzie* described a visit to a mental asylum, "yesterday we went to the [Smith?] Asylum, but the man did not let us see any of the people[,] but he carried us all about in the home and we saw some of the cells that are not occupied and some of the girls picked out one and I amongst them."<sup>25</sup> This visit, to what was most likely an unsavory place, was edited by St. Mary's faculty, the girls saw the facilities without seeing the potentially disturbing patients housed there. Another girl wrote about a visit to a menagerie, "Mr. Smedes took us all to see the menagerie the other evening...though it was very inferior, yet when there were about fifty girls, we could not fail to have fun.. .the Ethiopian singers

<sup>23</sup> Jenny to Miss Mary 1 Cranberry, September 15, 1845, series 4, box 69, item 672, SMS.

<sup>24</sup> Suzanne Lebsock, "Female Autonomy and Personalism," in *Major Problems in the History of the American South* ed by Paul D. Escott and David R. Goldfield (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1990) 411.

<sup>25</sup> Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, April 11, 1857, series 1, folder 8, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

were also with them, but Mr. Smedes would not let us go to see them."<sup>26</sup> Again the girls were taken to a different experience beyond the school grounds, but they were protected from the potentially damaging encounter with Ethiopian singers. The field trips undertaken by the girls were just enough to broaden their experiences without endangering their Southern delicacy.

Activities engaged in on campus, but outside of school hours were also designed to give the girls appropriate experiences to prepare them for their future lives as good citizens and as ladies. "Cumulative examinations, student-initiated publications, and commencement addresses illustrate not only the range of subjects commanded but the subjectivity they were fashioning as learned women appareled in the values and vocabularies of republican citizenship."<sup>27</sup> At St. Mary's these sorts of activities took various forms. The girls had weekly music nights, at which attendance was required for boarders. On such nights girls would sing, or play or recite for each other. Select townspeople were even invited to listen. These nights were opportunities for girls to show pride in their accomplishments before a contained society. The Kimberly girls were constantly requesting that their father attend one of these nights:

Father when you come, some Friday evening and stay until Sunday and the Saturday evening you can hear the girls play on the piano, we have music every Saturday evening, and some sing and some play on the harp. Doctor Smedes often invites people from town to come to music so you [could come] and Mr. and

Mrs. Smedes would be happy to see you so come.

*Lizzie* and Emma made frequent mentions of Soirees the girls preformed on a less frequent, but more formal note. *Lizzie* Wilson Montgomery, a former student, recalled

<sup>26</sup> Kate deRosset to her father, March 6, 1846, box 83, item 790, SMS.

<sup>27</sup> Kelley, 97.

<sup>28</sup> *Lizzie* Kimberly to John Kimberly, March 7, 1857, series 1, folder 8, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

that "these entertainments were looked forward to and prepared for with great care, curl papers, and braided hair. Visitors from town were invited and many came and looked on from the long divans, listening to the music, often very fine, furnished by harps, pianos and voices."<sup>29</sup> One girl wrote how the governor himself attended an event in which she preformed.<sup>30</sup> These incidents were a periphery, although essential element to keeping the girls stimulated but safe.

The curriculum of St. Mary's included not only various academic subjects, but in depth artistic studies, fieldtrips and performances before each other and the public. This all inclusive style of education was attractive to Southern elite because it provided for a wide range of expertise and skills. However, the instruction received at St. Mary's was not the only appeal of the school, other factors played important roles as well.

In a short time we will be to each other only "memories of the past". Let these times serve to keep bright that memory. And in future years to recall the happy days in which you and I were school girls together. And let thoughts of me be pleasant thoughts of a most sincere and attached friend. Fannie Evans<sup>31</sup>

Thus wrote Fannie to her schoolmate Rachel when it came time for Rachel to leave St. Mary's. In this message Fannie manifested the deep affection she had developed for Rachel during her time at school.

While attending school, girls received more than just intellectual education; they developed social networks and formed friendships that would last a lifetime. The

<sup>29</sup> Katharine Drane Perry, "In the Beginning: 1842-1860," in *Life at Saint Mary's*, ed. Katherine Batts Salley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942). 26.

<sup>30</sup> Lizzie Wilson Montgomery, *The St. Mary's of Olden Days* (Raleigh: Bynum Printing Company, 1932), 19, box 64, SMS.

<sup>31</sup> Fannie Evans to Mary Hicks, May 31, 1857, *Hicks Gift Album*, box 67, item 673, SMS.

connections girls formed were important both on a personal emotional level, as well as on an economic level for their families; "Very few pla

comforts for near strangers. A series of letters dealt with an incident in which a poor girl was being educated at St. Mary's, Lizzie wrote:

Father I have something to say to you I must know you will not object to [what] it is. There is a girl named Henrietta Sherwood and [she] is such a nice girl .. .Doctor Smedes schools her and to pay him for schooling her she is obliged to teach for him, and I doubt very much whether she will even see her mother or little sister again or not for she is to stay here such a long time as she is poor and cant save up enough money to carry her to new Jersey to see her mother, and it is sisters' and my project to ask you to send her with us as far as New Jersey and set her down at her mothers and when we come back to bring her back with us and it is to be at sisters' and my expense the money that comes to us for to buy any thing we like is to be saved by you and that will I hope be enough to carry her there, and Father for two years hence we will not ask for any money or any thing [for] we have spent ours in carrying a poor girl to see her mother.<sup>35</sup>

Though Emma and Lizzie have only the slightest acquaintance with this girl, they are unclear on her age even, they willingly sacrifice their spending money in order to aid her. In another series of their letters they expressed concern over one of their sick companions and requested that their father attempt to contact her brother who was attending school at Chapel Hill.<sup>36</sup> They show earnest desire to improve the lives of their peer group.

The interest Lizzie and Emma took in their peers, exhibited the kind social involvement and concern that girls were encouraged to develop at school. Various activities of daily life served to strengthen the bonds of friendship girls formed. Emma wrote about how she enjoyed having many companions about, "I don't know what to tell you for there is hardly ever any news downtown it is very dull down there but not up here for there is so many little girls about my age and size for me to play with."<sup>37</sup> Play companions as a child, would become appropriate lady's acquaintances as a woman. The

<sup>35</sup> Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, March 16, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 8, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>36</sup> Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, August 22, 1857 and Emma Kimberly to John Kimberly, August 22, 1857 and Emma Kimberly to John Kimberly, August [day illegible], 1857 and Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, September 12, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 10, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>37</sup> Emma Kimberly to John Kimberly, February 20, 1858, series 1, box 1, folder 12, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.



girls also presented each other with constant tokens of affection. Lizzie wrote about friendship tokens the girls gave one another; "the wild flowers are blooming in the grove and the girls go out and pick them and make nice little bouquets and give them to the girl she loves best, I wish I had a large bunch of hyacinths."<sup>38</sup> Friendships were important to the girls of St Mary's, and even to quiet Emma and Lizzie, daily interactions with fellow students were a constant part of their school experience and important for their education as Southern women.

Some of the tenderest expressions of care for one another were found in the gift and autograph albums of the girls. These messages manifested how strong the bonds formed at school were, and showed their potential for being maintained into adulthood. Girls wrote poems, composed passages, quoted verses, drew pictures and placed tokens within these books as testament to the meaning of their friendships formed at school. A page from the Leary autograph album<sup>39</sup>, dated 1848-49 shows a beautifully painted picture of birds<sup>40</sup> captioned by a poem wishing for the owners' future happiness. Another page has a colorful bookmark for a token of friendship.<sup>41</sup> Numerous flowers are found flattened and preserved within the pages of these books. Just as Fannie did, many writers did not fail to mention St. Mary's as the spring from which these friendships grew. St. Mary's style of education brought together these elite girls so that close bonds were formed that were sustainable and desirable in future adulthood.

Families wanted to insure that their daughters were behaving well and getting along with their peers, since such peers could become important future relations. In a

<sup>38</sup> Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, March 28, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 8, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>39</sup> *Leary Autograph Album*, 1848-1849, Mary V Leary, series 4, box 67, item 660, SMS.

<sup>40</sup> See image 2.

<sup>41</sup> See image 3.

letter, one mother advised her daughter to be kind to everyone in order to develop good habits for social relations. She warned that bad habits or deceits must be stamped out early before they become too ingrained to master. She expressed the necessity of universal kindness and even referred directly to a relationship which her daughter was endangering, "a real Christian lady or gentlemen was polite even to those they know do not like them. Brother told me that Cousin Lauras' family spoke to them in sorrow of your indifference to them. I was very sorry to hear it, you could take a walk there occasionally if you do not stay. So adopt this course I have recommended of being polite and thinking kindly of every body."<sup>42</sup> In another letter, a sister advised her younger sibling to make solid and well chosen acquaintances at school because they might play an important role in the girl's social future:

Your schoolmate Eliza Ann and myself had a long talk about you and I hope that your conduct and deportment is such as to ensure the affection of all your schoolmates. The acquaintances formed while at school are different from those formed in after life. There is a social feeling, and sympathy, we have with them which we do not feel for the acquaintances of afterlife—Besides, the girls you go to school [with] are all of your own country and those you must [be] sociable with in after life—try to establish good character amongst them for amiable [word illegible] deportment.<sup>43</sup>

Socialization was an important and necessary component to the success of the education girls received at St. Mary's. The friendships girls formed were "expanding the social capitol... [that] their families had already provided them. Serving as a basis for networks linking women locally, regionally, and nationally..."<sup>44</sup> Exposure to, and success within, an appropriate peer group was a vital element of St. Mary's education and was key to its success in educating girls to be Southern women.

<sup>42</sup> Mother to Mary Lindsay Margrave, [month illegible] 2, 1857, box 73, item 712, SMS.

<sup>43</sup> Unknown parent to Unknown child, October 26, 183[number illegible], series 2, folder 14, "Bullock and Hamilton Family Papers #101," SHC.

<sup>44</sup> Norton, 103-104.

Authority figures at St. Mary's were a great deal more than simply maintainers of order. They were a surrogate family which helped to guide the girls' intellectual and emotional development into refined and educated young women. Smedes and his teachers were persons in the daily life of the girls to whom they could turn when in need of a variety of support. The faculty escorted girls downtown, insured that all their clothing and supply needs were met, celebrated their birthdays, encouraged them to excel academically, cared for them when they were sick and advised them when they were troubled. The hard work of the faculty did not go unnoticed by the students; Dr. Smedes in particular received many kind descriptions from his students. Sixty years after his death, *Lizzie Wilson Montgomery* wrote:

Not only did Dr. Smedes know how to teach but how to govern; to make himself honored as well as loved; to constrain his pupils to feel that the years spent under his care were at the same time the happiest and most useful of their lives. He has gone to his reward but his work remains, and will remain from generation to generation.<sup>45</sup>

The love and respect this man engendered in his students is prominent and indisputable. In order for this new expanded type of education to succeed for elite southern women a special type of leader was called upon. More than a teacher, Smedes was a friend, father, and guiding light for his girls who oversaw their education in all aspects, whether intellectual, social or religious. Other teachers formed close personal relationships with their students, and recorded an earnest desire to see their pupils developed fully both as students and individuals. By catering to the students as both teachers and compassionate

<sup>45</sup> *Lizzie Wilson Montgomery, The St. Mary's of Olden Days* (Raleigh: Bynum Printing Company, 1932), 13, box 64, SMS.

friends the faculty at St. Mary's was able to create the environment necessary for the development of proper southern ladies.

Dr. Smedes was no replacement for Emma and Lizzie's parents, but while at school, he was a constant source of guidance, affection and inspiration to his students. "PS Mrs. Smedes has treated me very kindly but I wish I could see you,"<sup>46</sup> wrote Emma to her father. So much more than an educator, he filled the important role that the changes in women's education necessitated. Girls needed to be educated, and it was an education they could not receive at home, but they needed strict rules enforced with a gentle caring hand. Instead of instilling fear in them Albert Smedes inspired them to perform their duties at school and beyond it well. Inspired by one of Dr. Smedes' sermons, *Lizzie* wrote to her father about how she wished to be a vehicle through which he may unload his burdens. She quoted biblical passages that Smedes had used to convey the importance of sharing troubles with one another and of showing active interest in the hardships of others. "He that [word illegible] will be opened into him, and he that seeketh shall find. And unto him that asketh shall be given, is not that so? Oh father I wish you could hear Dr. Smedes preach he preaches beautiful sermons, he it was that lead my thought to [word illegible]." <sup>A7</sup> Serving as a headmaster, teacher and rector, Smedes guided the girls in many ways, and the fact that Lizzie expressed the above sentiments to her father showed that the teachings of Dr. Smedes expanded to the girls' lives outside of school and within society.

<sup>46</sup> Emma Kimberly to John Kimberly, July 18, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 9, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>47</sup> *Lizzie* Kimberly to John Kimberly, [month illegible] 17, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 10, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

Smedes cared for his girls in much the same way that they cared for him. A series of letters between him and Kate deRosset, one of the first girls at St Mary's, following her graduation showed the closeness of their friendship. Upon Kate's marriage Dr. Smedes wrote:

. . .whether it is in my power, or Mrs. Smedes', to be present at the marriage of our beloved child. . .my Katy . . .But your accepting him for your husband is sufficient proof of his worthiness... and tell him, if you make as docile, as affectionate, and in one word, as good a wife, as you were a pupil of St. Mary's, you will be to him an inestimable treasure... Mrs. Smedes joins me in the assurance that you are one of our dearest children. With most sincere affection I am

Yours truly, Albert Smedes

Later letters have Smedes and deRosset commiserating on the death of their children in the Civil War. He saw Kate as his own daughter and took active interest in the twists and turns of her life following graduation. Kate too returned this affection, a letter written by Dr. Smedes describes how the girls felt towards him and the school, "my dearest Kate. . . no assurance is so delightful as the testimony I have received from you. . .from others of our daughters, that our discipline is such as to excite in them the feelings of filial gratitude and esteem."<sup>49</sup> It was important, as headmaster and rector, that Smedes saw his girls as more than just pupils, but as future women, therefore he sustained relationships with them as women. The new education for Southern girls required this sort of consistency from a headmaster, and St. Mary's delivered it.

Girls at St. Mary's saw teachers both as educators and as friends and family; they cared for them, and were cared for in return. By becoming more to the girls than just sources of authority teachers provided extra motivation for girls to perform well in an effort to please them. Teachers also set important examples of what it meant to be an

<sup>48</sup> Albert Smedes to Kate deRosset, February 21, 1848, box 83, item 790, SMS.

<sup>49</sup> Albert Smedes to Kate deRosset, January 25, 1848, box 83, item 790, SMS.

accomplished lady. The expanded education of girls required an expanded relationship between the pupils and their educators. Like the relationships girls formed with Smedes, the influence of their teachers carried them beyond the walls of St. Mary's and likewise their presence in the school was kept alive in the memories of the teachers that remained behind after they left.

The letters of Emma and Lizzie revealed the important role that teachers played in their lives. While plenty of mentions are made to the regular scholastic interactions the girls had with their teachers, they also referenced the ways they cared for their teachers and people and how their teachers cared for them in turn. In a postscript to one of her letters *Lizzie* wrote:

Father, Mrs. [name illegible] a teacher here is going away and never coming back again because she is an invalid all the girls are going to give her a present, sister and myself want to get her one will you please send us some money to get one and what is left over at will give to sister. Mrs. [name illegible] is next to the head of the school and at least I mean she is next to Dr. Smedes, she has been teaching here almost as long as Dr. Smedes, good bye.<sup>30</sup>

Far from their families, birthdays could be lonely times for the children, Emma wrote, "My teacher gave me such a nice present my last birth-day, I love my teacher dearly, she is so good.<sup>10</sup> She not only esteemed her teacher, she loved her.

Like the relationship between Albert Smedes and Kate deRosset, other teachers formed affectionate and lasting bonds with students. "Miss Evertson speaks very often of you and with much affection. She says 'you live in her heart every bright and pleasing.'"<sup>32</sup> Thus wrote Rebecca M. to a St. Mary's graduate who had inquired about

<sup>30</sup> Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, May 16, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 9, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>31</sup> Emma Kimberly to John Kimberly, April [day illegible], 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 8, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>32</sup> Rebecca M. to Kate deRosset, August 1, 1848, box 83, item 790, "deRosset Collection," SMS.

the goings on at school after her departure. The writings of other girls at St. Mary have illustrated the affection between teachers and students even more clearly. In a beautifully written note, one teacher expressed her affection for a graduating student:

My Dear Mary,

When you are reading this little note of mine, you will be separated from me and our dear St. Mary's some distant- Oh! It is sad to think that those we love, should be taken from us and never perhaps will find an opportunity to meet with them again.

If it is God's will, my darling Molly, that I shall not see you anymore, the remembrance of your dear countenance and sweet disposition will be indelible in my thoughts.

My heart presses me to tell you, how unbounded my love is for you; not only as a teacher loves, because you were always a faithful scholar, but as a dear friend, as a sister.

God bless you my dear Mary and shield you with his Holy Arm, so that your years of your future life, may pass away as smoothly and happily as those of your school life have gone.

And not farewell my dear friend. Remember times (when you are alone in your chamber) with a kind thought those who love you so fondly Your happiness my prayer Your friendship my desire Emma Paetyold<sup>53</sup>

Such a sweet and thoughtful note showed the depth with which these two cared for one another. Students saw teachers as sources of comfort and advice. While Dr. Smedes could serve as a father figure, teachers could fill similar parental positions. Alice deRosset wrote;

Three new scholars came yesterday and now we have 86 boarders, the school is full to overflowing.. I can't always go to Mr. Smedes when I feel doubtful about anything because he has so much to do. Mrs. Evertson is very kind to me she will tell me anything and will give me advice whenever I need it.<sup>54</sup>

Teachers gave girls the guidance that they needed in order to develop not only as scholars but as people. This highly involved and affectionate relationship between teacher and student was necessary to affirm the new kind of education women needed to receive.

<sup>53</sup> Emma Paetyold to Mary Lindsay Hargrave, December 3, 1858, box 73, item 712, SMS. <sup>54</sup> Alice deRosset to Aunt Lizz, May 3, 1851, box 83, item 791, "deRosset Collection," SMS.

Even as they were independent of home at school, they had a family formed within the faculty and a society within which they functioned.

\* \* \*

An essential factor to the success of the education provided at St Mary's was the support and encouragement girls and faculty received from the student's families. Southern elites valued their daughter's educations enough to send them away from home and invest significant time and resources to insure that they received complete and thorough instruction. Within the Kimberly collection, the meticulousness alone, with which John Kimberly preserved his daughters' letters and report cards, was testament to the interest he took in their well being and development. Though few letters are saved from him to the girls, their responses to his writing displayed his evident concern for their performance in school. Lizzie wrote about her report cards to her father:

Father my report this month will be so good and it will be so long as I go to school, I have commenced in good earnest. I have 8 and 8 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>A</sub> most all the way down and some 9, 8 and 8 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>V\*</sub> are very good mark[s] so the teachers said they would be content and more than content to get it, Father Miss O'Connor my writing teacher did not give me a high mark in writing, and she does not give it to any of the girls unless they write a beautiful and none of them do that even when they try.<sup>33</sup>

John Kimberly's interest in the scores his daughters received was displayed in their anxiety to explain their marks to him. Several of the letters contain similar references to and explanations for excellent or poor marks. Another means through which John Kimberly's involvement was displayed was an occasionally occurring literary conversation the carried through some of his letters from Lizzie. In one instance *Lizzie*

<sup>55</sup> *Lizzie* Kimberly to John Kimberly, August 22, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 10, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.



described to him the book or books she was currently reading<sup>56</sup>, in another she commented on a book which her father had lent her to read.<sup>57</sup> Even as the girls lived away at school, John Kimberly helped to guide and to influence their mental growth. John Kimberly also expressed distress over whether or not his daughters took dancing lessons. In one dialogue *Lizzie* requested to be enrolled in dance classes, in her subsequent letters she apologized repeatedly for having distressed her father by asking such a foolish thing. Mr. Kimberly's strong feelings that dance was not necessary for Lizzie's education were evident in the concern Lizzie expressed over his disapproval; this fact was demonstrative of the passionate interest he took in the subjects his daughters enrolled in.

Other members of the family took similar interest in the progress and growth the girls underwent while being instructed at St. Mary's. One of the earliest letters to the girls came from their Aunt Mary; she showed a distinct interest in the girls lives at school and their progression:

The reception of your letters gave as much pleasure - pleased to hear so directly from you and know that you were well now that you can write so well I expect to hear from you again , you can let me know what number of borders you have and teachers and if the month of August was vacation.

I expect that you have grown very much Lizzie grows so fast. She will be a young lady in size before one in mind unless she applies herself closely to her studies.<sup>58</sup>

By having provided the girls with innocent and simple questions to answer about school, and remarks on the importance of growing their minds even as their bodies grow Aunt

<sup>56</sup> Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, April 4, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 8, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>57</sup> Lizzie Kimberly to John Kimberly, July 18, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 9, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>58</sup> Aunt Mary to *Lizzie* and Emma Kimberly, September 10, 1856, series 1, box 1, folder 6, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

Mary involved herself in the education process. The education of these wealthy daughters was a concern of immediate and extended family alike, as entire family futures could have rested on the educations of daughters.

Examples that involved other girls make clearer the kind of support and encouragement girls received from their families. Parents looked forward too, and expected the monthly grade report to arrive and they took time to investigate the information contained within. In regards to the monthly reports, Emma wrote:

the teachers, send them off and if they put them in the hands of the girls they think that the girls relatives, friends or guardians will never see them, reports because their relatives or guardian some of the are very anxious for the improvement of the girls for instances Colonel [name illegible] is very anxious for the improvement of Amanda and Bettie.<sup>39</sup>

Another example of the anxiety over grades was reflected in a letter written to Mary Lindsay Hargrave by her mother in 1857:

I received your letter yesterday and your report alas, recording to your report you stand hot in every thing, and I sincerely hope [illegible word] it, you know it gratifies me, and father and all your friends, to see and to hear of your good standing. There is nothing that I could hear in your absence that would give me so much pleasure than that you were performing your studies in a cheerful consistent way.<sup>60</sup>

Mary's mother wrote explicitly that her daughter's academic standing was a source of concern for herself and others, and that she received a degree of pleasure knowing when Mary was doing well in such a regard.

The education young women received at St. Mary's provided them with the foundation on which they could develop as Southern women, parents took a deep interest in what was included in that foundation. Mothers and fathers as well as other relatives

<sup>39</sup> Emma Kimberly to John Kimberly, October 17, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 10, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>60</sup> Mother to Mary Lindsay Hargrave, [month illegible] 2, 1857, box 73, item 712, SMS.

wanted to be sure that their children were in turn getting as much as possible from that foundation.

\* \* \*

The affects of a broad curriculum, selected peer group, caring faculty and supportive parents may be observed in the attitudes the girls themselves took towards their schoolwork. That Emma and Lizzie valued their educations and were concerned over their performances was undeniable. They and other girls cherished time at school as mentally stimulating and socially interesting. Both girls had a strong desire to improve and to see their improvements. They were often ready to list their shortcomings, although with regret, in order to describe their plans for improvement, each girl has several examples of desiring to do well in school and cherishing her education.

The monthly reports, so carefully kept by their father, were a commonplace topic in their letters. They frequently requested that their father save those reports so that they might be able to observe their own progress over time. Emma wrote, "Father I want to ask you something; please whenever you get done with my reports send them back to me; I want to see how much I will improve this session. I have got the report I had the last month of last session."<sup>61</sup> Emma went into details in a series of letters about her marks in punctuality. She explained how she preformed poorly or well punctuality, and how she planned to change her behavior for the better in the future. Emma cited the source of her poor performance and then sets herself out with a solution to this problem. Emma also detailed her struggle to improve her writing, she recorded; "I like to go to school but I believe I will never learn to write every day I try to take so much pains with it I have 3

<sup>61</sup> Emma Kimberly to John Kimberly, August [day illegible], 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 10, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

half hours in the day to write. First half hour in the morning. Last half hour in the morning. And the first half hour in the evening."<sup>62</sup> Such daily concerns were testament to the care Emma invested in her education at St. Mary's.

*Lizzie* displayed the value that she put on her own education when she wrote to her father and expressed her desire to teach; "We would have a nice little house farm and a little schoolhouse and I could teach would it not be nice? It seems to me I would rather teach than do anything else."<sup>63</sup> She had developed a love of learning which she desired to carry on into her future life. In another couple letters *Lizzie* recorded her desire to be actively employed at school; "I am becoming anxious to return to Raleigh and employ myself at books." and upon her return to school; "I reached here yesterday much to my gratification for I began to be tired of doing nothing"<sup>64</sup> *Lizzie* later continued on to state her plans to work very hard that session. Like Emma, *Lizzie* expressed her concerns over personal defects, both in her academics and her disposition, but she also expressed her efforts and desires to improve these defects:

Father I am so wicked I do believe I never will learn to be good like others, I do not envy any body in their riches or station but only their goodness[,] not even that I ought to envy but try to be like them but it is hard father to be so meek and submitting and unmindful of self, I hope I may before you come back learn to congress all my passions and when you see me you will behold your daughter beautiful in mind if she is not in person.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Emma Kimberly to John Kimberly, August [day illegible], 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 10, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>63</sup> *Lizzie* Kimberly to John Kimberly, [month illegible] 17, 1857, series 1, box 1, folder 10, 1857, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>64</sup> *Lizzie* Kimberly to John Kimberly, August 12, 1858, series 1, box 2, folder 16, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>65</sup> *Lizzie* Kimberly to John Kimberly, August 19, 1858, series 1, box 2, folder 16, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

<sup>66</sup> *Lizzie* Kimberly to John Kimberly, [month illegible] 30, 1858, series 1, box 2, folder 18, "John Kimberly Papers #398," SHC.

Lizzie wanted to improve her knowledge and performance in school as well as her disposition. Much of the aim of the tuition received at St. Mary's was to form balanced educated women, who possessed a wide variety of knowledge while at the same time were socially tactful and virtuously good. The attitudes of Emma and *Lizzie* towards their education are evidence of the success St Mary's achieved towards this aim.

The success of St. Mary's in the 1850s was testament to its ability to fulfill the desires of the Southern elite for their daughters. St. Mary's school was innovative in that the education it provided both expanded a girl's knowledge as well as raised her in a comfortable environment that fulfilled her emotional needs. Parents were pleased with St. Mary's because it gave daughters an education that would appropriately prepare them for Southern lady hood Emma and Lizzie's experiences at St. Mary's bear witness to the success of this form of education. Without careful attention to curriculum, peer group and faculty the school could not have been the success that it was. The support of family members both towards their daughters and the school itself helped the girls to develop a crucial interest in learning. By adapting to the desires of Southern society; the preservation of social rank and gender roles within a republican society, St. Mary's made it possible for the expansion of the role of women's education in the antebellum South.

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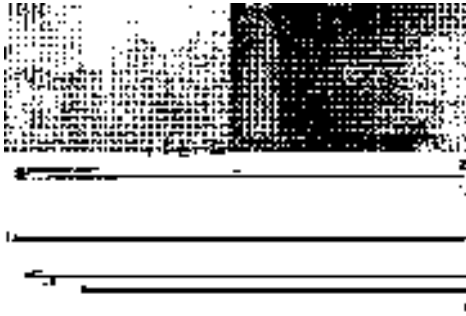


Image 1: Geometry sketches from Adele Kron's notebook.



Image 2: Drawing of birds from *Leary Gift Album*.



Image 3: Note and bookmark gift from the *Leary Gift Album*.

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