

CONVENT OF THE SACRED HEART, SCHOOL
1821 Academy Road
Grand Coteau
St. Landry Parish
Louisiana

HABS LA-54-C
LA-54-C

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CONVENT OF THE SACRED HEART, SCHOOL
(Academy of the Sacred Heart)

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Location: 1821 Academy Road, Grand Coteau, St. Landry Parish, Louisiana

Significance: Founded in 1821, the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Grand Coteau is the oldest of nearly 200 convents of the Religious of the Sacred Heart scattered across the globe and the home of the first miracle in North America recognized by the Vatican. Now known as Academy of the Sacred Heart, this historic institution of higher learning for women was only the second established west of the Mississippi. The campus has expanded through additions made to the original buildings while surviving adversities such as the Civil War, the Great Depression, and social reformations that erased nearly all single-sex institutions.

Description: Sitting at the end of a long allée of live oaks, the original three-story red brick schoolhouse building overlooks the formal gardens and has the form and details of a French Colonial plantation house. A Flemish Bond brick pattern was used to create the load-bearing walls and is accompanied by a seam in the brick arrangement indicating one of many additions made to the original framing.

History: In 1818, The Holy Foundress of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, Mother Barat, sent two nuns from the original colony to the New World to establish a convent. In 1821, a wealthy local widow donated 150 acres including a 55 foot long, two-story wood-frame building and three smaller houses for use as an educational institution for women. A year later, the student body nearly tripled in size and a new log house was built to account for the additional residents.

Less than a decade after its opening, as the number of students and residents grew, a new building was constructed at a cost of \$9,200 in 1830. The spring of 1835 saw the development of the grounds according to designs by Bossuet. Numerous trees were planted and a formal garden full of elevated flower beds of various shapes was laid out in front the main schoolhouse. Another addition came in 1845, which included a third floor and an expansion at the west end of the building adding approximately two thirds of its original length. The Greek Revival chapel was built in 1850.

The struggles between the Union and the Confederacy threatened the school's existence, but Union Gen. A.P. Banks, whose daughter attended the Academy in New York, instructed his officers to protect the property

and students. In 1866, the school became the site of the first miracle in North America as young Mary Wilson, whose life was threatened by an incurable disease, was upon her death bed for several months. With virtually no hope of recovery, she received her Holy Viaticum and was read the prayers of the Dying. Later that evening, she had a vision of the Blessed John Berchman, assuring her that she would in fact become well again. Much to everyone's surprise, Mary had made a full recovery by the next morning.

The School of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart at Grand Coteau has endured many difficulties through the decades, but continues its dedication to the education and social upbringing of young women that Mother Barat set out to accomplish nearly 200 years ago. The property today has expanded to more than 350 acres and become the longest functioning school in Sacred Heart's existence. The grounds receive many visitors and are considered a place of pilgrimage and deemed sacred by the Pope himself.

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