

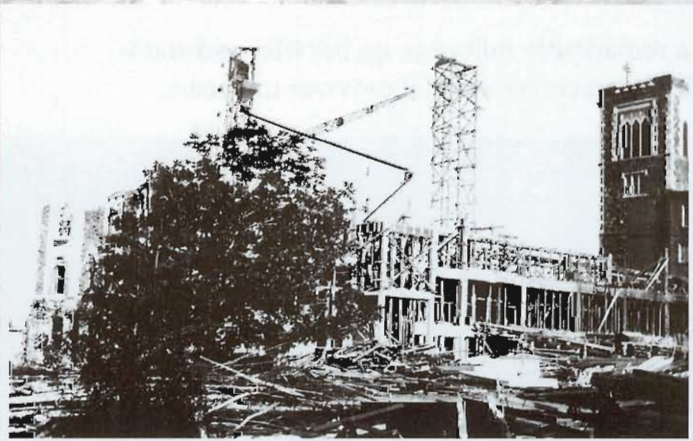
Completing The Work

By Sister Margaret Clarke

This is the fourth and final installment of a multi-part history of the construction of Tower Hall and the Sisters' move in 1909 to this site.

*So often as you begin a good work, pray earnestly to God to bring it to completion.
RB Prologue 4.*

In May 1924, the last month of Mother Chrysostom Doran's administration, she recommended to the Chapter that "no further building should be undertaken for at least two years." Her successor, Mother Agnes Somers, seems to have honored that suggestion to the letter: on August 22, 1926, the Chapter was presented with architects' preliminary drawings and an estimate of \$200,000 for "enlarging the Villa." After some discussion, the Chapter voted unanimously to proceed. Why Mother Agnes chose new architects, the St. Louis firm of P.M. O'Meara and J.B. Hills, has never been recorded. She also took local counsel, reporting in *All Her Ways* that she consulted Bishop Thomas Welch (1926-1959): "It was under his enlightened guidance that the Sisters, in the fall of 1927, planned and executed the completion of . . . Tower Hall." Judging by the finished product, the final building differed from the 1906 German and Lignell plan only in the central section, with now two towers flanking an elaborately decorated entrance.



The 1928 addition to Tower Hall under construction

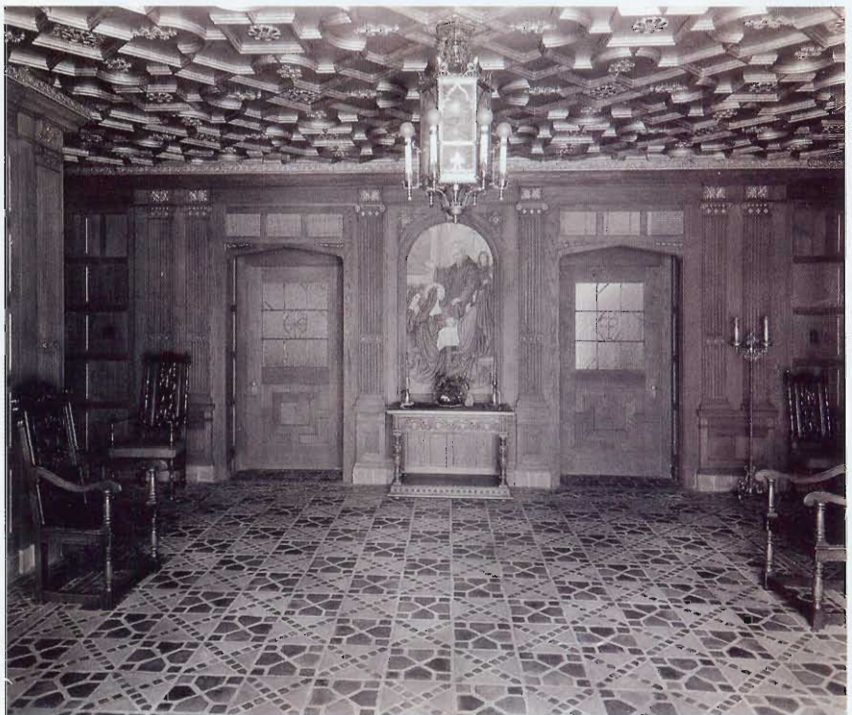
On December 11, 1927, Mr. Cassidy E. "Casey" Jones of Duluth was "stolen" from another construction project to become the Superintendent of Construction, for a total fee of \$5,000. He worked through the O'Meara and Hills branch office in Minneapolis and left a copious correspondence about every aspect of the work. By February 1927 construction had begun. Basalt "blue trap" stone was obtained from the quarry on the "back forty," and in place of imported limestone some cast concrete was used for the exterior trim. The new addition—a wing extending along the main axis toward the north—included a full ground floor. It was therefore necessary to excavate what is now known as the tunnel below the existing south wing and lateral kitchen wing to continue this floor below the main building. Much to the delight of the Sisters and students, the long-postponed elevator was also installed in its waiting shaft. Three large fifth-floor rooms were constructed between the towers in the center section. On March 24, 1928, the new wing was ready to be occupied. The College and Academy students were happy once again to have separate quarters.



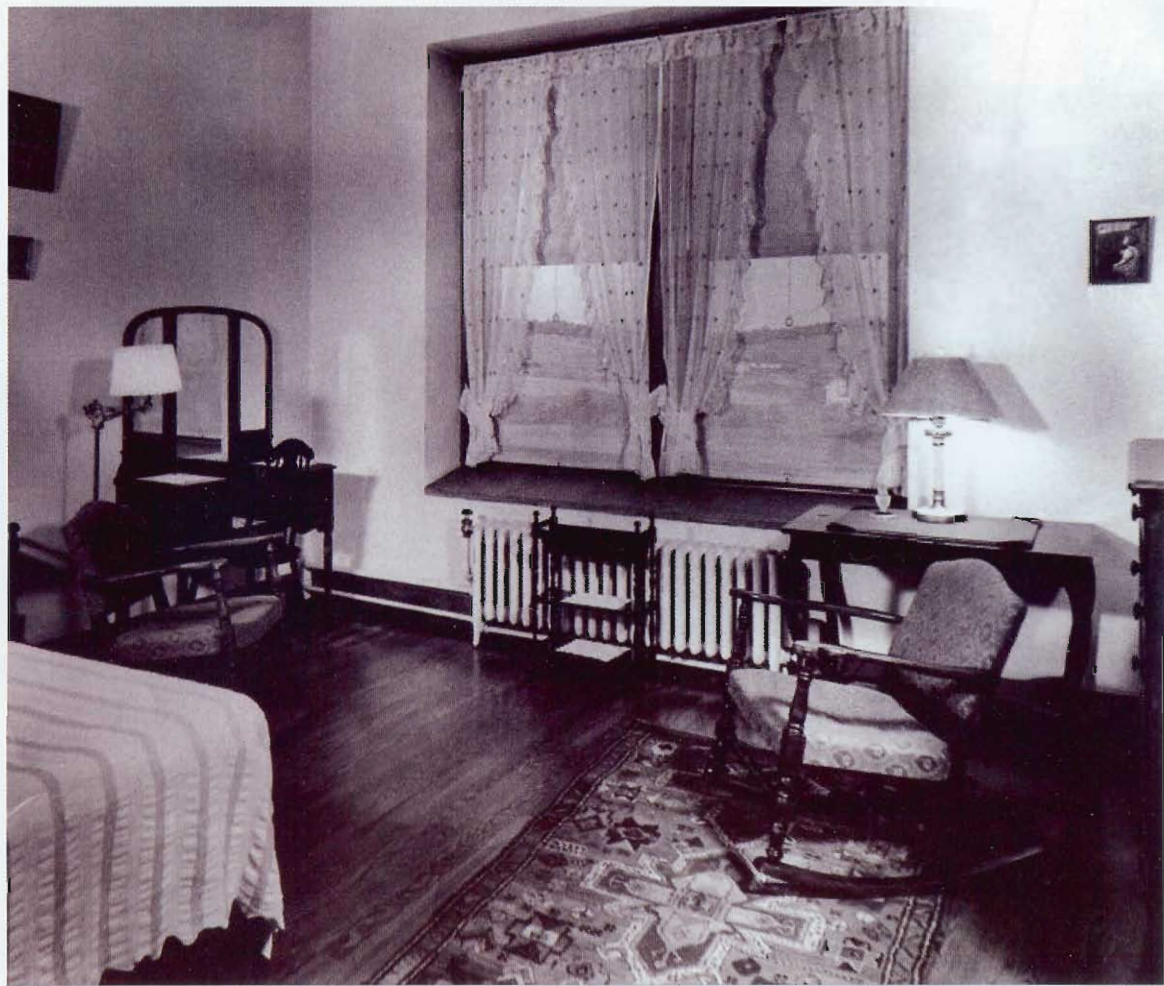
Tower Hall as completed in the spring of 1928

Walking through Tower Hall today, one can easily discern the dividing line between the 1909 and the 1928 sections. Terrazzo floor patterns, millwork, and light fixtures are all subtly different. There is a 10-foot drop between the tunnel and the ground floor of the new wing, which have been connected first by steps, then a ramp as OSHA regulations came into existence. The external aspect of the completed building has remained as it was when completed, but inside walls have gone up and been taken down with amazing frequency as the needs of the College dictated. In celebration of the centennial of Tower Hall, historic photographs of room interiors are being installed throughout the building.

The architects also planned the interior decoration of the lobby and adjacent parlors. They chose a Tudor motif, with plaster parget ceiling, wormy chestnut (or perhaps cypress) paneling, Nemadji ceramic floor tile and Kasota marble trim. It is as impressive today as Mother Agnes, a great anglophile, had hoped it would be. She immediately established a fund to pay for appropriate furnishings, and the chairs and console table now in the lobby, which are reproductions of 17th century pieces, were purchased from the Grand Rapids Furniture Company.



The lobby of the Tower Hall addition. The painting of the Last Meeting of Sts. Benedict and Scholastica was done by a St. Louis artist—a copy of a print owned by the Sisters.



A College student's dormitory room in the new addition

The O'Meara and Hills company remained a favorite of Mother Agnes: in 1937 as O'Meara, Hills and Quick, they were hired to plan the Chapel/Library/Stanbrook Hall buildings, in 1945 as Maguolo and Quick to plan Victory Hall at St. Mary's Hospital, and in 1957 an addition to St. Mary's Hospital. Mother Agnes also chose studios in St. Louis for the interior decoration of the Chapel.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION:

"I have heard that the two towers are different because in the Middle Ages they always built cathedral towers with differences because it was regarded as presumptuous to make things 'perfect.' Is this correct?"

- The person who told you this was confusing architecture with oriental rugs—where a “mistake” is always included in the pattern to indicate that only God is perfect. It is true that some cathedrals, like Chartres, have two different towers, but this is usually due to there being a lapse of from 50 to 500 years between their construction, with a change in architectural taste in the interim. Our 1921 tower has wooden louvers in a simple wooden frame. The 1928 tower has louvers surrounded by stone Gothic tracery. This was probably just the choice of the architect, with no definite rationale in mind.

Photos from Monastery Archives