

History of Ancillae- Assumpta Academy

*Ancillae-Assumpta Academy has a proud history –
a history rich in tradition and woven with the fabric of imagination and vision.*

Ancillae-Assumpta Academy is a private, co-educational, Catholic elementary school sponsored by the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an international religious congregation dedicated to the work of education. The Handmaids were founded by St. Raphaela Mary in 1877, in Madrid, Spain. Today there are nearly 1,100 sisters throughout the globe who work towards sharing God's gifts and promoting the vision of their foundress. The Wyncote community is one of six Handmaid communities in the United States.

Ancillae-Assumpta Academy is located on a ten-acre campus in Wyncote, Pennsylvania, a suburb outside of Philadelphia. The property was once the stately mansion of George Horace Lorimer, editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*. The original name of the estate, Belgrame, was a combination of Lorimer's two children's names, Belle who died at an early age, and Grame who later developed into a well-known author in his own right. We use the name, *Belgrame*, for our school yearbook.

During the prosperous twenties, Herbert Hoover was a frequent dinner guest at Belgrame. Other visitors included such well-known figures as the artists N. C. Wyeth, Neysa McMain, Arthur William Brown, and the long-time *Saturday Evening Post* cover artist, Norman Rockwell. The poet, James Whitcomb Riley, authors Booth Tarkington, Damon Runyon, Irwin S. Cobb, and the great mystery writer Agatha Christie also visited Belgrame. It's no wonder that the Academy feels a special responsibility to value the diversity and creative abilities of our students, continuing the legacy of those who came before us and were part of Belgrame's past.

In 1945, the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart purchased the Wyncote property at 2025 Church Road several years after Lorimer's death. In 1946, the sisters began kindergarten classes as their first educational endeavor, and one year later, opened a private elementary school for girls called Ancillae Academy. Ancillae is the Latin word for handmaid. In 1957, at the request of parents, the boys' school, Assumpta Academy, was started. Seven students were in the first class at the school named after Mother Assumption, one of the founding sisters who is still part of the Wyncote Handmaid community.

In 1969, the two schools, Ancillae Academy and Assumpta Academy, merged under a single administration and a single name, Ancillae-Assumpta Academy. Sister Elizabeth McCoy was the first principal of the new co-educational entity, and her leadership produced both programmatic development and much-needed physical expansion.

In 1971, the merger was complete with boys and girls sharing homerooms, teachers, and school activities. The campus now consisted of classrooms in the original Mansion House and Carriage House, the gymnasium which was built in 1965, and a new building with four classrooms and administrative offices constructed in 1970. Also in 1971, the Academy received licensure by the Pennsylvania State Board of Private Academic Schools. That same year, the Montessori method of education was introduced into our nursery and kindergarten programs.

Throughout the 1970s, the Academy continued its commitment to quality education with the introduction of new student services and programs and improvement of the facilities to include an athletic field, outdoor play area, and a kitchen for a new lunch program.

In 1980, two major developments occurred. Construction was started on a new building with eleven classrooms, offices, a faculty room, a chapel, and a library. Ancillae-Assumpta Academy completed its self-study and proudly became one of the first one hundred schools to be accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.

In 1989, with the school experiencing exponential growth, a restructuring of the administration took place with Sister Elizabeth McCoy becoming its first Director, and Sister Maureen Gillespie taking on the role of Principal. Sister Elizabeth's responsibilities centered on curriculum development and institutional advancement, while Sister Maureen oversaw the daily operation of the school and the needs of the faculty and students.

In the mid 1980s, Sister Elizabeth designed and developed the R.I.C.E. Process, a visioning and restructuring plan for staff development, curriculum development, and networking programs. R.I.C.E is an acronym for the values of Responsibility, Interdependence, Creativity, and Empowerment. Ancillae-Assumpta Academy's commitment to the goals of this process has been key to maintaining the level of quality that has earned our school awards, recognition, reaccreditation, and respect. For example, in 1986, Ancillae-Assumpta Academy earned recognition for its excellence in education by the United States Department of Education. In 1989, the Academy was one of the first twelve elementary schools selected to receive the Drug Free Recognition Award. In 1992, and again in 2010, Ancillae-Assumpta Academy received the National Blue Ribbon Schools Award for excellence in education from the United States Department of Education. In 1990, Ancillae-Assumpta was one of the first six elementary schools to gain approval of an entrepreneurial project for accreditation purposes, when it received a ten-year reaccreditation from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools for a special project on the R.I.C.E. Process.

In 2001, the Academy received another ten-year reaccreditation by the Middle States, through further developing and applying the R.I.C.E. Process and presenting a colloquium entitled "The R.I.C.E. Process: Building our Future Together with Technology and Fine Arts". The completion of the Technology and Fine Arts Center in 2002 actualized the goals of providing our students and teachers with the resources to integrate technology and developing talent education. Sister Elizabeth McCoy died on March 29, 2004, and the new construction was fittingly renamed the Elizabeth McCoy Center in her memory, honoring the thirty-six years of steadfast service to the students, families, faculty and staff of Ancillae-Assumpta Academy.

Following Sister Elizabeth's death, the administrative team expanded to include key positions in the school exemplifying the shared responsibility model that she so dearly valued. Members of the team have specific administrative and program responsibilities and work together with the faculty and staff to fulfill the school's philosophy and mission and to respond to the educational needs of our students. The administrative team promotes the use of language and structures that actualize our vision for education through cooperation, communication, evaluation and planning, and on-going learning.

For the next six years, Sister Elizabeth's successor, Marian Dondero, continued to improve the campus facilities by modernizing the Student Dining Room, establishing a Resource Learning Center, adding a 2nd floor for 5th and 6th grade classrooms, renovating the 3rd and 4th grade classroom area, building a link to connect the Fiat Center and Handmaids Center, renovating the Fiat Library and St. Raphaela Mary Chapel, and creating a STEM Lab. The most recent improvement is the construction of a new entrance lobby to the Stepping Stones area. Each facility upgrade enhances the overall learning experience for our students.

A plan for thematically naming the buildings was completed in 2009 and gave meaning to the ministry of education that takes place daily at Ancillae-Assumpta Academy. The Sacred Heart Center (formerly the Mansion House) houses our youngest students in Stepping Stones, Pre-School, and Kindergarten. This is also the sisters' residence. The Elizabeth McCoy Center is primarily dedicated to instruction in the Fine Arts. The Fiat Center encompasses all the classrooms for grades one to eight, the St. Raphaela Mary Chapel, the Fiat Library, the Student Dining Room, the STEM Lab, and the gym. The Handmaids Center (formerly the Carriage House) houses the Resource Learning Center, the Extended Day Program, and several additional classrooms for science and Spanish in grades 5 to 8.

In 2010, Kerry Harp became the third Director of the Academy. With her skills, dedication, and prior experience in serving the school as both a classroom teacher and Assistant Principal, Kerry welcomes the opportunity to move Ancillae-Assumpta through the Middle States accreditation process for the fourth time.

As a school community blessed by its remarkable past and encouraged by its exciting future, Ancillae-Assumpta Academy is equally proud of its present day reputation and dedicates all its resources to making a difference in the lives of those entrusted to us as students and citizens of the twenty-first century. With confidence, competence, and compassion, we continue to follow in the footsteps of those who began the journey of "educating with love and for love" and continue to strive for excellence and in every undertaking we endeavor. Upon entering the school, one is reminded "Be it known to all who enter here that Christ is the reason for this school. We believe that Christ's presence permeates every space. Christ is the model of our faculty and the inspiration of our students".