

FROM THE ARCHIVES



BRINGING TOGETHER TWO SCHOOLS WITH THE SAME NAME, SEPARATED BY AN OCEAN

{Part one in a series}

Starting in 1941, our school hosted girls from war-torn England as part of a program evacuating children from the dangers of the German Blitz. In that first year, we had seven students come to us from a few schools in England. That number grew to thirteen students the following year. While this program closed with the end of World War II, our school continued to have ties to schools in England. By the end of the 1950s a pen-pal relationship with "our sister school", St. Mary's Hall in Brighton, England, had developed into a student exchange program. For the next dozen years individuals from our St. Mary's Hall and their St. Mary's Hall crossed the Atlantic Ocean to spend a year at each other's schools.

Here is the recollection of one of the students who came to us from England, Patricia Dahl, printed in the St. Mary's Hall (Brighton) publication, *News Letter & School Magazine*, No. 62, December 1960. Patricia began her time here in the U.S. staying with the Collins family, including Alice Collins Fisk '61.

"On September 2nd, 1959, the liner "Nieuw Amsterdam" cruised slowly up the Hudson River and into New York Harbour. What an awe-inspiring and breath-taking sight it was—the Manhattan skyline against a slowly

lightening dawn sky! "This is New York," I said to myself over and over again, "and I am really here!" Even at that point, I found it hard to realize where I was!

"After standing in long queues for three tedious hours (and the terrible New York humidity did not ease matters!), I eventually passed through the Immigration and Customs enclosures and met the Headmistress, Mrs. Slater, Mrs. Collins and Alice, with whom I was first staying, and Hedl Decker, my second host.

After lunch, we drove to my new "home" along the New Jersey Turnpike—one of the many wonderful fast and straight American roads.

"There was just over a week before school started, and I settled down quickly, finding the Collins charming people, as were Colonel and Mrs. Decker and Hedl, with whom I lived for the last four months of the year. On the first day at school, I found the Burlington St. Mary's Hall very similar to our St. Mary's Hall.

Burlington was founded one year after ours, in 1837, with the style of the buildings very alike.

"Let me describe to you a typical school day. Unlike most English schools, American schools have school buses (for those who do not drive to school as a good many do), and

one of the three St. Mary's buses picked up Alice and me at 7:45. The school has its own Episcopal Chapel—the Episcopal Church being the daughter church of the Church of England, and every morning we would have a shortened service of Morning Prayer, conducted by the school Chaplain, Father Conklin, or by Mrs. Slater, or by Miss Taylor, the Dean of Girls, or, as on Fridays, by one of the Senior girls, and I myself conducted the service on one occasion.

Three lessons were held in the morning, each being fifty minutes long. My first was English, which included American Literature, the second, U.S. History, then Games, Scripture or Health, according to which day of the week it was. Lunch was much less formal than it is here. Americans eat their main meal in the evening, so have just a snack at midday. One could either have school lunches or bring them from home, and lunch was usually a sandwich—and not a dainty tea-sandwich by any means—or a famous American hamburger with ice cream to follow.

"Afternoon school for me began with Study Hall (a free period). Then I had French and History of Art, and school finished at 3:30 and, on Fridays, at 2:45. This timetable was the same every day, and that is a big difference

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between English and American schools. American children take four or five subjects and have them every day for the whole year. No wonder they were so shocked when I told them English children sometimes take as many as nine subjects!

"The entire system in American schools is much more informal than in English schools. There appears to be a different and more intimate relationship between girls and staff, which, of course, has its advantages and disadvantages. St. Mary's Hall is a Private School (they are in the minority in America) with the majority of girls intending to go to College. Therefore, there is a considerable amount of homework, as all American students with this aim have to work very hard.

"The Form system was, at first, a little confusing to me. The Classes run from 1st Grade (5-year-old) to 12th Grade, at which students graduate from High School. The four top Form were Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades respectively. I was a Junior for the first 'semester' (half year) living with Alice Collins, who was a Junior; and from January, a Senior, living with Hedl Decker who was Student Council President, or head girl.

"As in all American schools, there were many activities apart from the academic side. There were basketball, field hockey, volleyball, archery, tennis, and softball—the girls' version of baseball. There was the choir, known as the Glee Club which gave popular concerts with boys' schools, followed by dances; the Drama Club which produced the play, "Letters to Lucerne," in which I was chosen—very appropriately—to act the part of an English girl; there were numerous dances or 'Proms' organized by the various Forms of the Upper School. The biggest dance of all being the 'Senior Prom' which is a carefully planned and splendid occasion with evening dress and orchestra. There were also Form outings, such as a day trip to Philadelphia, and a Junior/Senior New York trip one weekend, in which we visited the New York Stock Exchange, the United Nations Building, the Metropolitan Museum and a Broadway musical. Colour Day (or I should I say 'Color' Day) was another occasion in which the Blue and White teams compete in races—at our Sports Day. Then there was the never-to-be-forgotten 'Christmas Mystery.' There the Nativity Story is acted in the Chapel, followed by a splendid Christmas dinner in the in the beautifully decorated, English-style, dining room.

"The major differences between the English and American St. Mary's Halls are, I should say: the wearing of make-up in American; the timetable difference; the driving of cars to school; the social life and activities; the absence of Christmas and Easter holidays as we have them: (American schools have a week or so at both, but break up for the Summer Vacation at the beginning of June); and an altogether less strict and disciplined atmosphere.

"I consider myself very fortunate to have experienced such an unforgettable year, with the overwhelming friendliness, hospitality and kindness which has given me a deep affection for, and understanding of, Americans and their country. I was conscious of my responsibility and the honor of representing our school and, in a small way, representing our country. I hope that I have left the same warm feeling for England as I now feel for America."

- Patricia Dahl, '60

October, 1959

ST. MARY'S HALL

St. Mary's Welcomes English Student



Principal Mrs. Thomas W. Slater, Hedl Decker, Patricia Dahl, Alice Collins

Patricia Dahl Comes from England For Year of Study at St. Mary's

To Be Continued...

