

# BASILICA SCHOOL OF SAINT MARY OF SAINT MARY SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

## EXHIBIT A: PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE CUPOLA

Photographs in this exhibit illustrate conditions of the current cupola that stands above the mainentrance to the Basilica School of Saint Mary of Saint Mary (2021 Photos by Alex Solsma, Basilica of St. Mary)



Cupola housing entrance at rooftop (2021 photo)



Entrance One at the Basilica School of Saint Mary of Saint Mary, 400 Green Street



Exterior enclosure of cupola housing showing existing condition (2021 photo)





Cupola wood framing and metal work (2021 photo)



Historic 1811 school bell and framework, detail below (2021 photo)



Cupola interior housing and hatch structure, showing current condition and areas in need of evaluation (2021 photo)



**EXHIBIT B: HISTORY OF THE BASILICA SCHOOL OF SAINT MARY**

During the first half of the nineteenth century, there were several attempts to establish parish schools associated with the Church of Saint Mary, now designated by the Holy See as the 84th minor basilica in the United States. In those times, Saint John's Academy, the Brothers' School, and Saint Mary's Academy, while not parish schools, were established as private Catholic schools that enjoyed a close association to the first Catholic parish in Virginia and its pastors.

In 1869, the Sisters of the Holy Cross opened Saint Mary's Academy (on the site which is now Alexandria Country Day School). The pastor of the Church of Saint Mary made an agreement with the Sisters that they would also help fulfill the need for a free parish school. That same year, two Sisters started Saint Mary's Catholic School, a free school for all parish children.

At first, the school operated from Saint Mary's Hall, a large brick building located at the corner of South Royal and Wolfe Streets (structure no longer survives). By the following year in 1870, there were twenty boys and twenty girls enrolled in this school. The building housed two separate classrooms on the first floor: one for the girls, and the other for the boys. Classrooms were heated by pot-bellied stoves; and the only available plumbing was located outdoors. Students rotated their seats so they would not become overheated while in class. Because there was no real playground for the children, South Royal Street closed to traffic during recess, and the students filled the street to play.

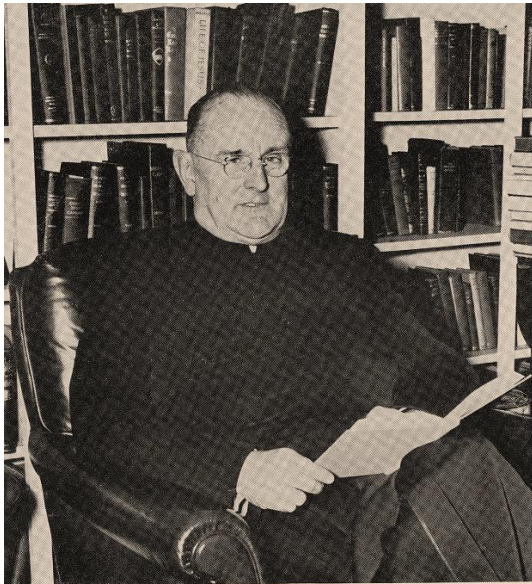
Crowning the original school building was a cupola, which housed the school bell. This very same bell (cast in 1811, pre-dating the 1827 Royal Street church) can be found inside the iconic cupola that crowns the Basilica School of Saint Mary at 400 Green Street. Every year on the first day of school, that same bell still rings to welcome students back to school, a tribute to over 150 years of continuing education for the next generation of Alexandria City youth. It has been noted that the Basilica School of Saint Mary cupola ranks among the most photographed landmarks in the City.



By the 1940s, the school population grew so large that the Sixth and Seventh Graders had to attend classes in Saint Mary's Lyceum at 313 Duke Street (now the parish offices and auditorium). The school was still free, underwritten by parish contributions. Wartime restrictions had prevented the construction of new school space. By the end of WWII, plans were firmly in place for a new, larger school.

Pullman Farm (adjacent to the Yates Gardens neighborhood) was chosen as the site of the new school. Originally purchased for the proposed expansion of Saint Mary's Cemetery, this large plot of land became the site of what is now the Basilica School of Saint Mary, playground and parking area located at 400 Green Street. After World War II, families in Alexandria were just beginning to recover from the severe financial impact of two world wars. Nevertheless, the Very Reverend Monsignor Edward L. Stephens urged the parishioners to generously contribute to the building of the new school.

In his message asking them to make a sacrifice for “these little ones” Monsignor reminded his parishioners of their duty to support education for the next generation of Alexandrians out of Christian charity and duty to God, neighbor, and country. His special message for the Third Sunday after Easter encouraged the fundraising for the new school, pictured with a spire design similar to the South Bell Tower of the Church building (*Monsignor Stephens Letter from the Basilica of Saint Mary Archives*).



THE VERY REVEREND  
EDWARD L. STEPHENS, LL.B., V.F.  
Pastor

### *A Special Message from Father Stephens*

Third Sunday After Easter

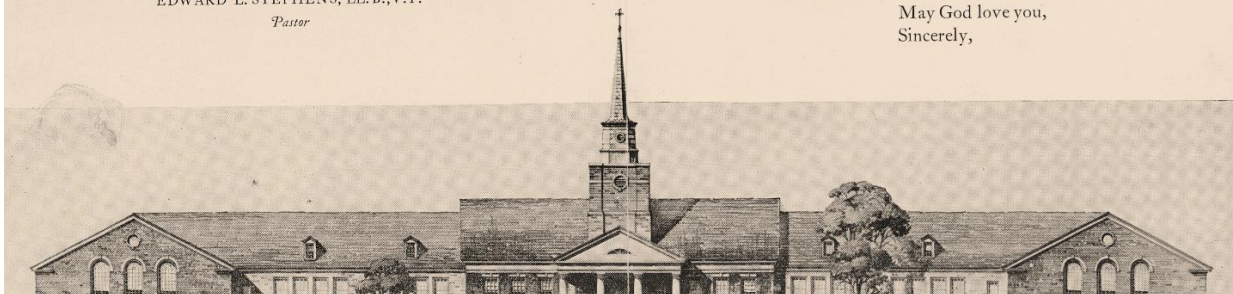
You know full well our plans and your plans for a new Saint Mary's School. You realize that to accomplish these plans we must raise \$150,000 to round out something more than the \$350,000 needed for the erection of the school.

You realize God's generosity to you; you know your debt of gratitude to Him for His goodness to you and yours. You realize full well that your responsibility to support Catholic education is based upon the measure of the material means which a generous God has given to you. You know that education without religion is only a partial and a warped education, and that on the other hand religion plus secular studies completely educate the whole child.

Together, they both make for the education of the child in relation to its obligation to God, neighbor and country. The foundation of and respect for all law is based upon the Divine teachings. Do your share now... and do it willingly and generously... and do it while you live! Help us to teach your children to know the Divine Law and to fulfill the Divine Will. From such a knowledge springs the charity of Christ to God... for neighbor... and for Country.

God expects your sacrifice for “these little ones.” Make this sacrifice.  
**GOD WILL IT!**

May God love you,  
Sincerely,



Construction of the new school commenced in 1948; and the design of the cupola changed to reflect a more Neoclassical Revival style, popular the mid-Twentieth Century. By March 1, 1950 students began the move into the “new school” as it was then known. The complex offered twelve classrooms, a library, the principal's office, teachers' lounge, clinic, cafeteria, and a multi-purpose room when it opened. When the school corner stone was laid by Bishop Peter Leo Ireton of Richmond, enrollment numbered 512 students (*Photo of Bishop Ireton from Basilica of Saint Mary Archives*).



As Alexandria expanded and the baby boom population peaked, there were 1,170 students enrolled in the school in the early 1960s. To better meet the needs of the growing school population, the west wing of the school was added in 1952, with five additional classrooms and a kindergarten. Until this time, the school was staffed exclusively by the teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross, who lived in the small convent on Fairfax Street. By 1954, it was necessary to hire lay teachers to staff the school. The parish



constructed a new convent adjacent to the school to house the teaching Sisters. The new convent served as a residence for the Sisters until it was converted to a Junior High in the mid 1990's. Designated as Stephens Hall in honor of Monsignor Edward Stephens, the building was renovated again in 2011 to accommodate the new Middle School for the Sixth through Eighth Grade students.



Changes and improvements to the school also included the building of Monsignor Wingler - Ella Hill Hall (more commonly known as "the Gym"). A large portion of the costs of construction were covered by a generous donation from lifelong parishioner, Miss Ella Hill. Upon her death, she had willed her house on Lee Street to the parish. Monsignor Joseph Wingler earmarked the profits from the sale of Miss Hill's house for the construction of the Gymnasium, which also serves as an auditorium. Over the years, the Gym has been central to the community, parish and school

life, offering a place for daily physical education classes, Home and School Association fundraisers, school dances, Sunday Children's Mass, musicals, drama productions, science fairs, CYO basketball, and large parish events including the annual Oktoberfest and **Irish Hooley** (Aerial photo of Saint Mary's School and neighborhood, dating to the early 1960s, Basilica of Saint Mary Archives).

Recently, the Basilica School of Saint Mary completed the First Phase of a \$12M multi-phased campus transformation and renovation. To date, \$6.2M has been raised toward an ultimate philanthropic goal of \$8M thanks to the great generosity of more than 600 parish and school families and individuals thus far. The First Phase renovations designed by Barnes Vanze Architecture (BVA) included a new designed Welcome Lobby and Vestibule for students, parents, and visitors. The entrance seamlessly integrates the latest protocols for health screening as well as other security procedures designed to protect the



students, faculty, and staff. Stained-glass accents and graphically illustrated school mottos celebrate the school history and Catholic identity, while advanced integrated security systems offer ongoing monitoring and protection from threats. (Photo courtesy Barnes Vanze Architecture)



The BVA campus-wide master plan for the Basilica School of Saint Mary of Saint Mary includes an 8,000 square foot 21<sup>st</sup> century library/media center which also serves to connect the elementary and middle schools illustrated below.



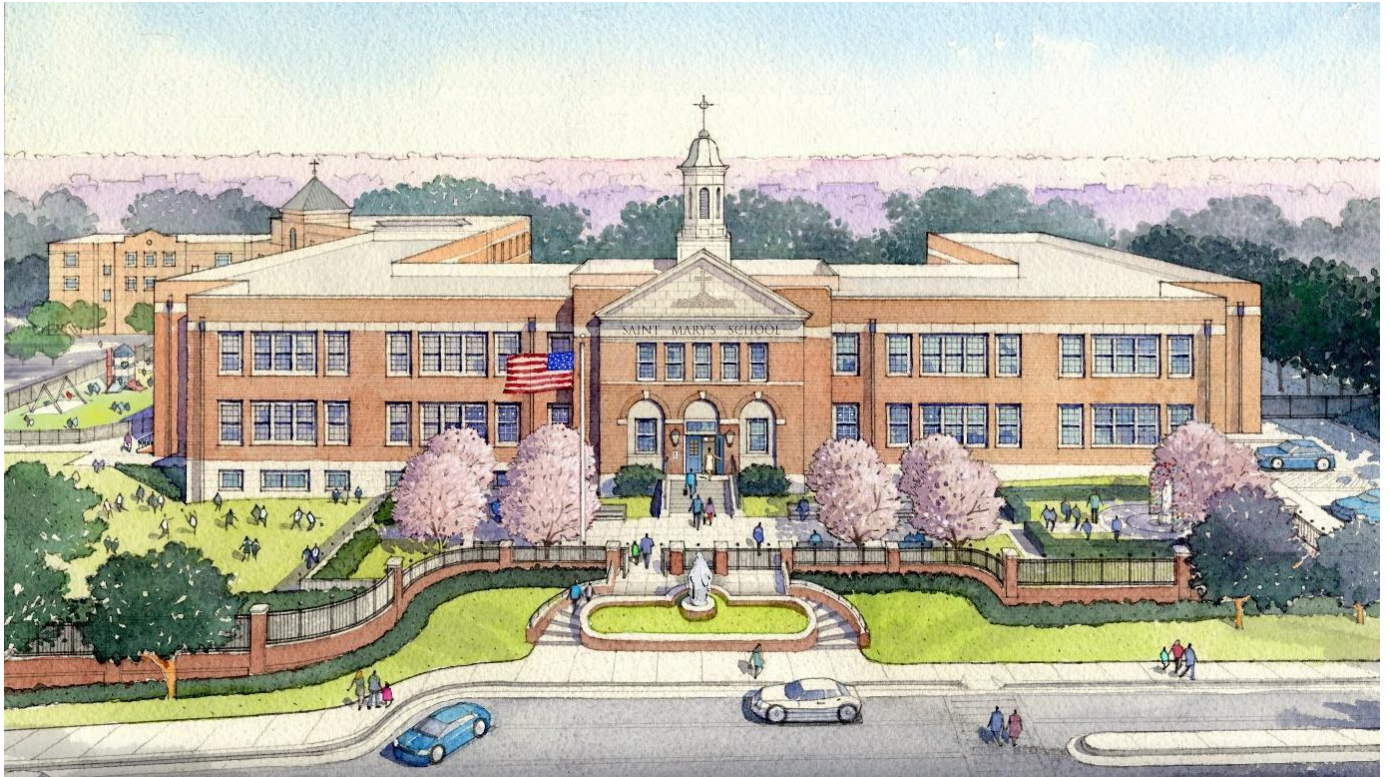


The plan also calls for new turf playing fields, improved faculty and staff parking, social gathering areas, and a Mary garden to enhance the beauty of the Basilica School of Saint Mary main entrance for students, educators, and the Yates Gardens and Old Town neighborhood community.





The “jewel in the crown” of this historic campus transformation project would be the restored Williamsburg cupola that graces the Basilica School of Saint Mary pediment at the Main Entrance.



Currently, this is not part of the scope of work, as all funding is needed to support the exterior and interior renovations.

Perimeter security fencing reflects the design of the neighboring residential hardscape, with the brick plinth bases and capped columns that provide the structure for iron picket infill fencing. The neighborhood benefits from the graceful double-sided curved staircase centered around the Basilica School of Saint Mary patroness and namesake. Improved vehicular access through the campus and through the neighborhood eases the congestion at the beginning and the end of the day, thus creating a more gracious and welcoming campus atmosphere and better neighborhood integration.



## **EXHIBIT C: LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

- **Catherine (Kitty) Guy** – *Author, Member of one of the Parish Founding Families, Fifth Generation School Student, Teacher, and Parish Historian.*
- **Cassie McLaughlin** – *School Parent of four School Graduates and Parishioner.*
- **Michael Patrick, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP** – *Principal, Barnes Vanze Architecture, Architect of Record for the Basilica and School, Parent of Student, and Parishioner.*
- **Mary A. D. Petrino, ASID, CID, LEED AP** – *Past President of the Washington Metro Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers, NCIDQ-Certified Commercial Interior Designer, Parent of CCD Graduate, and Parishioner. (If needed)*
- **Pending Letters** – *Anne Matthis Contacts*



The Historic Alexandria Foundation  
Attn: Grants Committee  
218 North Lee Street – Suite 310  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Re: Letter in Support of Grant Application: Cupola Restoration for the Basilica School of Saint Mary

To the Grants Committee:

My family has been in Alexandria since 1793, and we have belonged to Saint Mary parish since its founding. Five generations of my family have graduated from the school, and I taught there for over twenty years, a witness to the fine education, both academically and morally, that the children were privileged to receive. I was in the first class that attended the “new school” all the way from first grade through eighth grade graduation (1950-1958).

Throughout my years at Saint Mary, my classmates and I walked down Pitt Street to the school every morning. The entrance, topped by the imposing cupola, was always in front of us, a welcoming sight, beckoning us to enter. Whenever anyone mentions the school, this is the image they envision. It is hard to imagine the building without it. Its red brick walls and Williamsburg-style cupola blend in perfectly with Old Town Alexandria’s eighteenth and nineteenth century architecture.

Aesthetically, the large vertical cupola is the perfect contrast to the long, rather plain horizontal lines of the Georgian, colonial-style school. The vertical pediment on the entrance draws one’s attention up to the cupola: and most appropriately, to the Celtic cross atop the cupola, which pays homage to Alexandria’s Scottish founders as well as its Irish immigrants, whose support built this lovely school.

The current school building is almost seventy-five years old. However, it represents Saint Mary’s long tradition of providing an excellent education for Alexandria’s children. The original school building, at the corner of Royal and Wolfe Streets, opened in 1869—over 150 years. By the 1940s it was woefully inadequate. Monsignor Edward L. Stephens, the pastor, was deeply committed to education, and recognized the importance of erecting the finest quality school. Educational needs change over the years, but Saint Mary School has kept up with all the changes while still maintaining the character of this building. The parish is currently engaged in a project to modernize and expand the school, while maintaining the venerable school’s traditional appearance, including the cupola.

In 1995, I researched and wrote *Two Hundred Years for Christ*, the history of Saint Mary Parish. So many former students contributed stories about their years attending the school. Repeatedly, they praised the teachers for their dedication and the excellent education they received. And they were happy years. The teachers may have been strict, but they were also warm and caring. Those alumni who had attended both the old building and the current school could not say enough about the fine new school. Several years ago, I began to rewrite and expand the history for the Basilica’s 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the school’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Not only did a long list of former students contribute their memories and pictures; they also formed a very active Facebook group, “I Attended Saint Mary School,” to share their experiences and express their appreciation for the role Saint Mary School had played in their education.

Saint Mary School has always been open to Alexandria’s children, whether they were rich or poor. Today, the school has students from many races and cultures. Our special education program enables these exceptional children to receive an appropriate education while they still are accepted by their



classmates and know they belong and are loved. Generations of Alexandrians, in all walks of life, are graduates of the Basilica School, and contribute to our city, our country and our church. I believe we owe it to these students, teachers, and supporters of Saint Mary to restore its distinctive cupola. It is more than an architectural decoration. It symbolizes the huge contribution that the Basilica School of Saint Mary has made, and continues to make, to our city; as well as the affection of its thousands of students through the years—a fitting crown atop a fine institution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine Guy".

Catherine Guy, Church Historian  
6413 Bluebill Lane  
Alexandria, Virginia 22307  
[Kitguy100@aol.com](mailto:Kitguy100@aol.com)  
703 765 9478



The Historic Alexandria Foundation  
Attn: Grants Committee  
218 North Lee Street, Suite 310  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

April 27, 2021

Re: Support of Grant Application: Cupola Restoration for the Basilica School of Saint Mary

To the Grants Committee:

Please accept my appreciation for your service to our beloved community and consider my comments in support of funding the restoration of the Cupola of the Basilica School of Saint Mary.

I have been a resident of Alexandria for over thirty years, and although my grandparents were transplants to this area following World War II, our family's ancestors originally settled in Virginia in the 1730s. I moved to Old Town Alexandria specifically to be within the parish boundaries of Saint Mary Catholic Church. It was on the corner of Royal Street after mass that I met my husband, and where he later proposed to me. This is where we were married and where our four children received their sacraments. We are proud to call this our home.

For sixteen years, our children attended St. Mary's School. It was a small slice in the long history of the school, but the most impactful part of our family's life. Beyond academics and spiritual formation, the school hosted youth sports, scouting events, Christmas bazaars, Spring carnivals, St. Patrick's Day parties, Oktoberfests, and family bingo nights. The bricks and mortar of the school became the cornerstone of our social lives. The ringing of its original cast iron bell echoes back to earlier generations who were equally dedicated to the school, the parish, and the City of Alexandria.

Alexandria has always been a gateway to Virginia. Whether sailing to the waterfront, driving over a bridge, or landing at the airport, the first and lasting impression of Alexandria is the beautiful skyline of classic spires and belfries. The Cupola of the Basilica School anchors the City's southern end in similar fashion with the clock tower at City Hall; the steeples of Christ Church, the Downtown Baptist Church, and the Basilica Church of Saint Mary; and of course, the George Washington Masonic National Memorial. The oft told story of George Washington contributing funds for the building of Saint Mary's Church, as the first Catholic church in Virginia, is deeply cherished by our parishioners. It is a testament to the role of our predecessors in the City's early days and to the strong ties between Alexandrians from varying walks of life.

I believe that support from the Historic Alexandria Foundation for the restoration of the Cupola will preserve a significant architectural feature in our City and represent a continuation of our shared respect for the character of Alexandria.

Sincerely,



Cassie McLaughlin  
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703-684-7561