MESSAGE FROM THE ARCHIVIST

The year 2020 has been a trying time for all of us, and I would like to take this time to thank everyone who has continued to support the New England Osteopathic Heritage Center. Like many, what we do and the way we do it have been fundamentally changed by the pandemic. The year started out with many of the same goals as in prior years: processing collections, expanding digital access, conducting oral history interviews, and continuing outreach. However, in April I was furloughed, and most projects were put on hold until August. Despite these setbacks I am very proud of the work that we have accomplished.

This past year, with the help of our student assistant, Maddy Mark, we were able to process a large number of collections. Archival processing takes raw records, usually boxes filled with paper, photographs, publications, audio visual materials and artifacts, and turns them into properly preserved and indexed collections ready for use by researchers. Of particular interest are the William Bergen, D.O., and the William Kirmes, D.O., collections, both of which document the creation and early years of UNE COM. Along with processing collections, we have continued to digitize our holdings to make them accessible through UNE’s digital repository, dune.une.edu/neohc.

While this year has not progressed as any of us would have imagined, I am pleased with the work we have accomplished. Like many of us, I am hopeful for 2021. As many of you have heard, UNE has announced plans to move the College of Osteopathic Medicine to the Portland Campus. I am looking forward to working with UNE COM to help them preserve the history currently stored in offices and closets and to honor the history of the institution and the place. I also look forward to seeing your lovely faces at the MOA or ROME conferences and hearing your fascinating stories as we restart our Oral History project.

Thank you all for your continued support.

Zachary Enright, M.L.I.S.
NEOH C Archivist
Historical Spotlight

STELLA MARIS HALL

Stella Maris Hall has become an iconic building on the UNE Biddeford Campus. For many UNE COM alumni, it is a symbol of their time on campus and for many D.O.s, a symbol of the growth and development of the osteopathic profession. What began as a well-appointed colonial era home would become a boarding school and later the home of the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Europeans were exploring the land around the mouth of the Saco River, including the area that would later become UNE, as early as 1603, when Captain Martin Pring arrived from Bristol, England, with two ships. More famously, in 1605, Samuel de Champlain explored the area and became the first to map the area and meet with the indigenous people. While the town of Biddeford, then called Saco, was incorporated in 1653, the area around the present-day UNE Campus remained mostly unsettled. However, a small garrison stood on the future site.

Sometime around 1700, the Jordan family, who had inherited the land on which Stella Maris would stand, returned from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where they had fled to safety during King Phillip’s War. In 1740, Capt. Samuel Jordan and his son Rishworth constructed a new house on the site of the burned down garrison using the remaining eastern wall and roof. These portions of the old garrison had been built from green wood and, thus, survived the fire. They were strong enough that the Jordans were able to mount a cannon, and the story is told that when the house was renovated in 1902, the timbers were so hard that nails could not be driven into them. The Jordans were a wealthy, well established family and spared no expense in the construction of their new home. The house remained in the Jordan family for nearly 200 years.

In those 200 years, the town of Biddeford changed dramatically. The mills built along the Saco River drew large numbers of French-Canadian immigrants. The community grew and became more anglicized, especially in the early 20th century as child labor laws began to be enforced and Franco-American children began attending school. Father Arthur Decary, head of St. Andre’s parish, saw the need not only to preserve their Franco-American heritage but the need for social, health, and educational services. He would go on to help found St. Andre’s, a home for unwed mothers; Notre Dame hospital; Marie Joseph Academy for young women; and St. Francis College.

Father Decary was also instrumental in the creation of Stella Maris (which means “star of the sea”), an orphanage and boarding school run by the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. In 1931, the house was sold to St. Andre’s parish and renovated. The Sisters of the Presentation of Mary ran the orphanage and boarding school for 30 years.

In 1962, the Sisters sold the building and land to St. Francis College for $150,000. At the time of the sale, Stella Maris had 82 boarding students and 41 commuters. St. Francis College was expanding. The college had recently completed what is now known as Decary Hall. The addition of Stella Maris increased the campus to nearly 130 acres along the Saco River. The building was used to house the friary, college administration, and the library. Unfortunately, like many small liberal arts colleges at the time, St. Francis began to struggle in the 1970s. Despite attempts to shore up finances, the school was at risk of closure.

Salvation came in form of the New England Foundation for Osteopathic Medicine. The group had been searching for a location in New England to create an osteopathic medical school for over a decade. In May 1975, an agreement was signed, and Stella Maris was slated to become the home of the New England College of Osteopathic Medicine. The building needed major renovations in order to house the medical school, including the building of a morgue, laboratories, and classrooms. The renovations were determined to be so costly that it would be cheaper to tear it down and build a new building. However, funding was very difficult to come by and the decision was made to renovate Stella Maris. On October 2, 1978, the New England College of Osteopathic Medicine opened its doors to its first class.

Since the first class entered in 1978, Stella Maris Hall has been the heart of the University of New England College of Medicine. Over time, it has transitioned from a building containing the entirety of the medical school to one that houses the UNE COM administration and laboratories. It is fitting that, like many of the early osteopathic hospitals, UNE COM was established in a renovated old house.

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<th>APPEAL FOR DONATIONS</th>
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<td>Each year in this space, we ask you to consider donating materials you have collected that document the history of the osteopathic profession. However, this year, we are hoping to document the experiences of D.O.s during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such documentation can take a variety of forms. We have received essays, videos, and musical performances. Any format that expresses your experience is welcome. If you are interested in donating materials, please contact NEOHC archivist Zachary Enright at <a href="mailto:zenright@une.edu">zenright@une.edu</a>.</td>
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