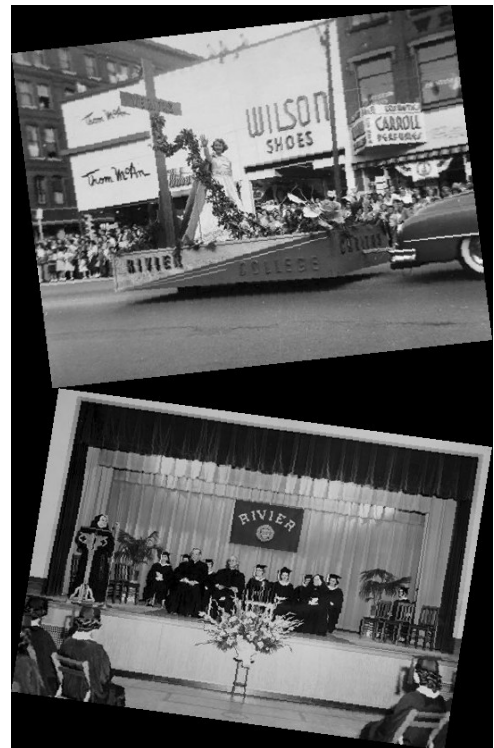


## CELEBRATING 75 YEARS: A LOOK AT RIVIER'S ROOTS

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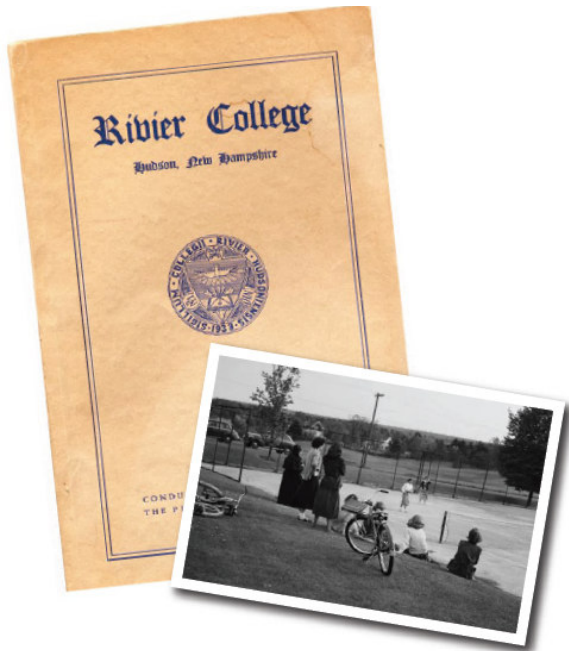
*Editor's note: This article is the first of two examining Rivier's growth and development over the last 75 years, including how the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary's values and Rivier's mission continue to shape the College today.*



Above: A Rivier College float was part of a parade.  
Below: An academic celebration during the College's early years.

In 1933, the Great Depression had a firm grip on the country. It was not a good year to start any new enterprise—certainly not a college. A liberal arts college, no less. For the daughters of the working class. The Sisters of the Presentation of Mary went ahead anyway. Their action mirrored the order's heritage—the French Revolution had been a daunting time to start a religious order, but that hadn't stopped Anne-Marie Rivier. Surrounded by political, social, and economic upheaval, she had transformed her vision into reality. In similar circumstances, a continent and two centuries later, Sr. Madeleine of Jesus did the same.

In 1933, Rivier College was an anomaly. "It was revolutionary," says President William Farrell. "The Sisters related to a group of people who didn't have a chance to attend college in the economic environment of the time and provided an opportunity most women didn't have." Most liberal arts schools served men; those educating women were usually elite schools open only to those with the means to afford tuition. The other option for women was normal school, where they could prepare to become teachers. Rivier's focus was truly unique.



The College catalog for 1935-1936. Students watch a game of tennis on a campus with fewer buildings.

Leaders of the fledgling school engaged in a fierce debate over who the College should serve: Should admissions be limited to those of Franco-American heritage or available to the larger community? Those with the broader view won out. The College opened its doors to women from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds and gave them all an education for leadership.

While Rivier's curriculum and student activities were designed to teach young women to become leaders, the most meaningful lessons came from watching the Sisters in action. Their determination to make the College a success and their dedication to their students set a powerful example.

"The beginnings were tough. We had nothing—we had no money, I don't know how we did it," says Sr. Adrienne Beauregard, p.m. She arrived at Rivier in 1941, just a year after the College had moved to Nashua from Hudson. "I didn't know what I was getting into," she says. "I was going to teach and work with children and the Lord said, 'That's not your business.' He got me working with pennies and

dimes and nickels instead." She served as treasurer of the College for 46 years.

The Sisters carefully considered how to spend the little money they had where it would do the most good. They did as much of the work on campus as they possibly could themselves, with help from the students. "Sr. Madeleine would pick up her gown and mow the lawn and we'd rake it up," says Sr. Adrienne. "We moved furniture from Foundress Hall (now Madeleine) to Molloy on a little red wagon. We moved oak desks to the third floor of Molloy ourselves—we were eager."

That willingness to do what needed to be done made a strong impression on many students, including Nashua native Marjorie Francoeur, who started at Rivier in 1948 as a chemistry major. After two years, she changed her major to English and got to know the other four students in the department well, even though she was a commuter and they all lived on campus. "We had all our English classes with the same professor, Sr. Clarice," she says. "Sr. Sylvia taught chemistry. Sr. Resurrection taught business. They *were* their departments."

Students and Sisters lived in the buildings where classes took place. They made the most of the space they had: Students sat in the stairwell in Foundress Hall for lectures; Sr. Madeleine of Jesus and Sr. Adrienne slept on folding cots in the room that served as the chapel. "Every morning we had to get up and put them away, then roll in folding chairs and kneelers," says Sr. Adrienne. Living and working in such close proximity to one another built strong bonds among the women at Rivier.

Sr. Marjorie says that her encounter with the Sisters inspired her to join the order. "Seeing their dedication, commitment and willingness to do it all on this campus—serve as teachers, administrators, housekeepers and everything else—to see that religious life spurred them on attracted me," she says. In 1952 she graduated with her bachelor's in English and entered the religious community; she returned to Rivier in 1958 to teach.

The changes at Rivier in the 1950s and '60s mirrored what was happening across the country in the wake of World War II. The population grew and more people began attending college. Rivier began offering more career-oriented programs such as accounting, and secretarial science. "Rivier did not see career education as a challenge to the liberal arts program," says Dr. Farrell. "The variety of programs the College offered focused on the needs of the community."



The Chapel in Foundress Hall, where Sr. Madeleine and Sr. Adrienne slept for several years.

As Rivier's enrollment increased, the College added buildings to accommodate the expanding student body. Memorial Hall, Regina Library, Mendel Hall and Guild Hall dramatically changed the campus. Sr. Marjorie says with the completion of the first dorm "students were beginning their emancipation. The number of students was so large, they took on more independence. Student organizations began taking on their own identities." Trinity Hall added another 100 students to campus and the change became more dramatic.

While each of the Sisters still held multiple jobs on campus, they could no longer handle all the work on their own. Lay colleagues became a growing part of Rivier's faculty and staff. The Sisters worked closely with them to maintain the school's Catholic identity.

While the Sisters' determination was the driving force behind Rivier's early growth and success, Sr. Adrienne acknowledges that they had help. "Insurance people went out of their way to help us. So did some of the bankers on our board: Mr. Barrett at Nashua Trust told one of the bankers, 'what that Sister asks, you do it.' They wanted to see Rivier grow so they helped us get favorable rates."

Sr. Adrienne's ability to find favorable rates and get the most with the Sister's money earned her a reputation for being able to find money for anything the College needed, no matter what the cost. When someone told Lowell banker Homer Bourgeois the Board wasn't sure where they would get the money to build Louis Pasteur Hall, he said, "Sr. Adrienne will find it."

She found money for Louis Pasteur and more. By 1970, the College had build Memorial, Guild, Trinity, Mendel, Louis Pasteur, and Adrienne Halls, as well as St. Joseph Annex, Regina Library and the Dion Center. Rivier had come a long way from its start with one building and three students.

In the 1950s and '60s, Rivier built dorms and classrooms; the campus and student body grew. In the next several decades, the College built stronger connections to the community; the College's programs, students and faculty grew in diversity. More than 14,000 alumni have played a part in Rivier's 75-year history; many others have had a lasting impact on the College. Read more in the next issues of *Rivier Today* and *InSight: Rivier Academic Journal*. ■

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