EXCERPTS

from the ARCHIVES

Nicholas Kemper '06, Archivist

Thursday October 19, 1843. A troupe of enthusiastic and animated St. Xavier boarding school students departs from their residence on Sycamore Street in downtown Cincinnati and heads east. The students have just finished the first three days of their school week and are about to enjoy a well deserved day off before continuing with their studies on Friday and Saturday. Under the watchful gaze of a Jesuit scholastic, the group winds their way for 2.5 miles until they reach their intended destination: the Purcell Mansion in Walnut Hills.

The property upon which the Purcell Mansion sat was originally purchased eleven years earlier in 1832 by Fr. Edward Fenwick, the first Bishop of the Diocese of Cincinnati, as a possible location for a seminary. Beginning in 1843 Fenwick's successor, John Baptist Purcell, instead allowed the Jesuits of St. Xavier College to use the property as a place of relaxation and play for their students. The 1843-1844 **St. Xavier Catalogue** notes, "Every Thursday in the year is a day of recreation. This day is spent by the boarders at the Purcell Mansion, a country seat about two miles distant from the city and commanding an extensive view of the Ohio River and surrounding country."

Initially comprised of 8.34 acres of land, the property featured a large house with pastures, groves, gardens, a vineyard, and of course, stunning vistas of the river and Kentucky. In May 1844 Bishop Purcell sold the entire property to the Jesuits for $9,000, and the site continued to be used by St. Xavier students as a destination for recreation until the summer of 1847.

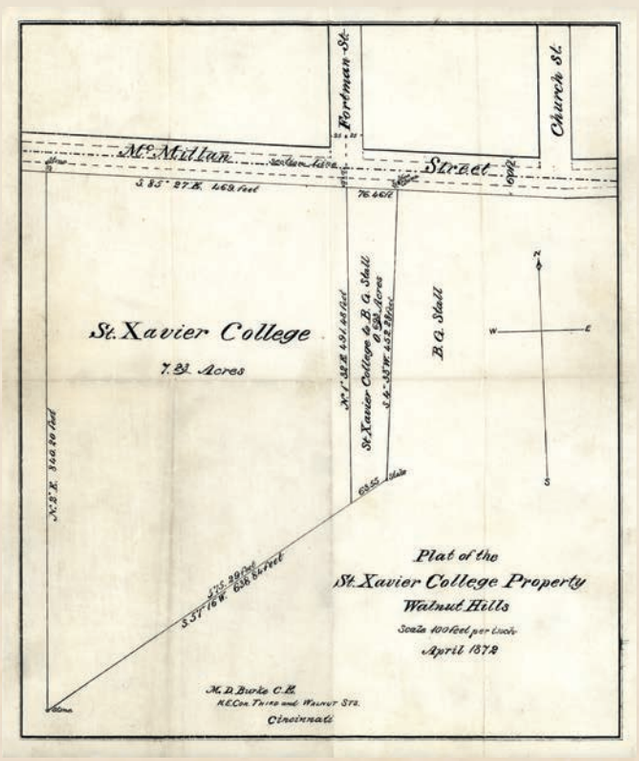
It was then that St. Xavier President John Blox, SJ chose to convert the mansion into a separate boarding school to house and educate students from the preparatory department; the pupils in this division were some of the youngest enrolled at the time, ranging in age from 7 to 13. The 1847-1848 **St. Xavier Catalogue** states:

> The Mansion has been enlarged during the past summer, so as to render it commodious for Boarders; and the elementary department of the St. Xavier College has been permanently transferred to it since the beginning of the present scholastic year, 1847-48. There, removed from the noise and distractions of the city, the youth of this department may lay the foundation of their education and acquire a fondness for industry and perseverance which may render them, one day, honorable, useful, and influential members of society.

However, the decision to house the youngest St. Xavier students away from the main school on Sycamore Street lasted only two academic years. By late 1849, the preparatory students were all back at the downtown location with their older classmates. It is believed that ongoing cholera outbreaks at the time helped to hasten the mansion school's closure.

The Jesuits continued to own and maintain the Purcell Mansion property for the ensuing two decades, often still using it as a site for recreation and leisure. This lasted until April 1873 when the Jesuits sold the land for $89,229.03.

Today in Walnut Hills there exists no evidence of the Purcell Mansion. The major thoroughfare just to the north of the property, McMillan, is still there; Fortman and Church Streets are now Moorman and Hackberry, respectively; and Ingleside Avenue is located just to the west of the former property. The spectacular and "extensive view of the Ohio River and surrounding country" is of course still there, a final vestige linking a little known chapter of St. Xavier history with the world of today.



April 1872 plat of the Purcell Mansion property; St. Xavier High School Archives.