

## State Saves St. Mary's

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On January 9, 1903, the infirmary at St. Mary's School burned. The incident was recounted some nine decades later by alumni Peter Valaer, class of 1906, in the *Agromeck*: Once we were lined up to be marched into the mess hall for supper [and] we saw dense smoke rising in the vicinity of Saint Mary's and we heard a rumor that Saint Mary's was on fire. We broke ranks and headed there as fast as possible, being quite fleet of foot in those days. I was one of the first to get there. The Saint Mary's Hospital was on fire-- from top to bottom-- and their rooms were filled with sick girls. Then I remembered there was a typhoid epidemic there at that time. On arrival we began hauling out girls from the building, laying them on the campus grass and rushing in the building for more. The excitement was intense and confusion reigned. The matron in charged checked on the blanket-covered girls and announced that "Mary" was still in one of the back upstairs rooms. Ward Shannonhouse, our famous pitcher at that time, dashed into the now furiously burning building. I followed him. Ward shoved me back saying that it was no use in more than one being burned to death, and up the burning steps he dashed, returning a few seconds later with the precious and beautiful Mary, wrapped in a burning blanket. Ward was also on fire and had hardly stumbled out of that burning inferno when the whole building collapsed into a huge burning mass.

All the girls that were in the hospital had been saved, although some suffered small burns. I also had a small burn, which I was proud of because the girl's swarmed around me to give me first aid, and it was perhaps the happiest moment of my life. O. Max Gardner, who was on the scene, seeing all the attention that I was getting, said in disgust, just like a darn freshman having all the luck. It was a glorious night (only a building lost) but no one was seriously hurt and the lives of a number of girls [were] saved. The fire department arrived late and couldn't get the water started, to it was a happy thing that N.C. State College\* was so near. The last thing I remember was a number of us were group and sang "good Saint Mary's, farewell (good night) to you, one last look into your eyes so blue," etc. When I got to my room I was very hungry because we had missed our supper that night. In my room I wrote the fire story of Saint Mary's in the *Red and White* (the monthly school paper). There is no doubt we saved the lives of most of the girls we hauled out because most of them in the hospital were quite sick and helpless. In our honor Saint Mary's gave us a party. We wore baby blue ribbons, badges and Saint Mary's colors, and the girls wore red and white dresses. It was a very happy occasion for N. C. State College.

\* The school was still called A. and M. College at that time, short for North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts.

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