Sisters’ Island has been in the news lately in connection with the transfer of care of 120 acres of IHM property to La-Z-Boy and the related planning for preservation of natural surroundings in cooperation with Monroe County and the Friends of the Academy Preserve. Conversations have taken place with IHM about their willingness to donate Sisters’ Island and the approximately .89-acre strip of riverfront land across from the island. IHM has agreed to do that with the condition that the island be preserved as open park space in perpetuity like the rest of the Academy Preserve project. These developments have sparked interest in the history and lore of the island.

Its records go back to 1807 when it was part of Antoine LaSalle’s estate. During the War of 1812, it was reported that the island’s low undergrowth concealed refugees who had fled across the ice from the LaSalle farm during the Battle of the River Raisin in January 1813. From LaSalle’s time until 1886 the ownership of the island changed 20 times. One of the more colorful owners was Edward Pincus, who purchased the island in 1852 from Roderick O’Connor for $300. He was described as a dapper little man who played the piccolo and operated a confection shop in Monroe. Rebuffed by the woman he loved, he moved to the island, which he called Belle Isle. He built the first foot bridge, a little store and a bandstand, and he invited the public to buy ice cream, lemonade and sweets from his store there while they enjoyed the island. Evenings it was a popular place with musicians entertaining the public.

When he moved to Philadelphia in 1854, he sold it to George Davis for $2,500. For awhile, William Kirschmaier continued operating the store, providing German music for dances and keeping lovely flower gardens.

On Sept. 2, 1886, Father Edward Joos purchased the island from William and Ellen Robert for $700. The next day he transferred ownership to Mary Riley (Mother Justina) for $1. His plan was that it be used for recreational purposes for St. Mary Academy students. According to the Monroe Democrat, a timber bridge between the island and Elm Avenue was begun Sept. 25, 1886 and finished Oct. 21, 1886, to replace the old “swing bridge.” Costing between $200-300, it had stone piers, was 124 feet long, stood 10 feet above the water and three feet higher than the island. The north end had a locked gate to discourage “aimless wanderers.” Joos also saw to the planting of many trees. Over time, ice packs in the river weakened the bridge and it was taken down in 1914. Visitors stopped going to the island, but its trees, shrubs and flowers flourished. This turned out to be fortuitous.

In 1931, when Sister Miriam Raymo was trying to figure out how to landscape the new Motherhouse-Academy campus with few funds to do so, she decided to use the island’s resources. During the winter, she sent men, who worked for IHM, to the island where they dug out about 1,000 trees, transported them by sleigh across the frozen river and later transplanted them on the new campus, where many still flourish.

Serving many purposes for over 206 recorded years, owned by IHM for 127 of those years, Sisters’ Island is about to begin a new chapter in the history of 21st century
Rena Geary, a Poet and Woman Impossible to Codify

In His Light Is My Joy

While April antiphons rang the gloom-time gone,
My countersong curved down the dancing air,
A-chime with alleluias everywhere.
And made a Paschal Praise whose radiance shone
Prismatic to God from whom its life was drawn.
The hills and I sang joy for joy to share
In Triune life, its answering echo there,
A joy, a joy—a dazzle on the dawn.

Dimly remembered now that April choir;
I search the songless hills for break of day,
And cry, "Return my Love, my Easter Fire,"
Until He bends white flame into a ray
Of sunrise that is blindness to my sight;
And night outspendors day and dark is light.

Theologian Elizabeth Johnson says of Mary,
"Whether studied from the point of view of

A Wonderful Memento

From 1954 to 1966 Mother Anna Marie Grix served as the general superior of the congregation. During her years IHM experienced significant growth in many areas: numbers, institutions, levels of sisters’ educations, states and countries served, and so forth. An able and experienced administrator, Anna Marie also liked cleanliness and good order.

It was said that when she put on her apron, rolled up her sleeves, and started making the rounds of the 376,000 square-foot Motherhouse, cleaning bees and reordering of some areas would shortly follow. A hallmark was often a note signed SAM (Sister Anna Marie) that directed the recipients to clean things up fast. And, they did.

Toward the end of Anna Marie’s term of office, Rose DeSloover, a young novice who was a talented and prolific artist, needed a place for all of the pieces of art that she had created and her art supplies. Novice directress Mother Benedicta (Margaret) Brennan found a spot in the large Motherhouse attic with good natural lighting that would be a perfect place, or so she thought. Rose was mainly interested in art and all that goes with it; precise and neat organization was not a primary value for her. She also had a great appreciation for other folks and their gifts, even when they were different from her own.

Predictably, Anna Marie came upon Rose’s work area; and, of course, it looked to her to be in bad shape. She wrote a note and left it for Rose. It read, “Clean up this mess! SAM” For most young novices, getting a note like this would be very upsetting, but Rose was intrigued by it.

She spent some time arranging the note in an attractive setting and covering it with protective plastic. When it was finished, she took it to Benedicta. “Look what I got! I think it’s the last written reprimand from Mother Anna Marie.”

Sometimes unusual things excited novices.

Her poem “In His Light Is My Joy” is an expression of some of these qualities.