Designed to Serve: the Places and Persons of Francis Hall was written by Sister M. Pacelli, OSF, and published in 2009 as part of the 50th anniversary celebration of Alvernia University. It covered the history of Francis Hall which is the historic foundation building that is still part of campus activities. Francis Hall has a rich heritage that is connected to both the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters and to the history of Berks County.

In recognition of the publication of Sister Pacelli’s book, this exhibit presents several unpublished photographs of Francis Hall from its pre-Alvernia days when it functioned as an orphanage, a seminarium for young women entering religious life, and a high school.
Sister Pacelli Staskiel, OSF

Sister Pacelli Staskiel, OSF, grew up in Mount Carmel in the 1930’s as Geraldine Staskiel, the daughter of Stephen and Margaret Staskiel, and attended the town’s public schools, graduating from Mount Carmel High School.

She went on to West Chester State Teachers College to study English and social studies. She also appeared in a number of stage productions at the university. During her senior year at West Chester she considered entering a religious order. Upon graduation in 1949, she did some substitute teaching, and then entered the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters in 1950. She eventually received the name “Pacelli,” Latin for “Little Peace.”

As a postulant and a young sister, she continued teaching, either at the elementary or secondary levels, while pursuing a master’s degree at Villanova University. She later earned a doctorate through Duquesne University. In 1960, Alvernia College President Sister Zygmunta asked Sister Pacelli to join the English Department faculty at the new college.

In the forty-nine years since Sister Pacelli joined the Alvernia College faculty, she has touched many of the school’s programs and students — as instructor, director, and dean, receiving the title of Dean Emerita and Professor of English and Communication Emerita for her work and dedication to the college and its students.

Designed to Serve is a companion book to Threads: A Tapestry of Alvernia College, which she published in 2002.
Dedication

St. Francis Orphanage was dedicated on September 12, 1926.

The program included a procession (top) and Dennis Cardinal Dougherty, Archbishop of Philadelphia, addressed the crowd (left).
A classroom in 1930.

Orphans and other participate in a flag raising ceremony in 1948.
Aspirants were young women of high school age who sought or “aspired” to become Bernardine Franciscan sisters.

The aspirants who have stopped for prayer are in an area on the lower level near what is now the criminal justice department.
Mount Alvernia High School

The library was housed in the space now occupied by the music department.

Locker room for commuting students.
Mount Alvernia High School

Classrooms in the 1960s.
The dining hall was located in the area now used as criminal justice classrooms.

The orchestra poses for a group photograph in the auditorium.