

Saint Mary's School ^[1]

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by Martha Stoops, 2006

See Also: [North Carolina Women's Colleges](#) ^[2]



Saint Mary's School, Raleigh N.C.

[Saint Mary's School](#) ^[3] in [Raleigh](#) ^[4] has been in continuous operation since 1842 as a school for young women. The Reverend Aldert Smedes and his wife opened Saint Mary's in May of that year at the request of the [Levi Silliman Ives](#) ^[5], bishop of the [Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina](#) ^[6]. Smedes held a law degree, had served as the successful rector of St. George's Church in Schenectady, N.Y., and had owned a school for young ladies in New York City. He came to [Raleigh](#) ^[4] because Judge [Duncan Cameron](#) ^[7] was willing to rent the campus of the defunct Episcopal School for Boys, which he had bought from the diocese at auction. From the beginning, Saint Mary's was considered a diocesan school even though there was no official connection until an 1897 act of incorporation. Because of the tutoring that was available in advanced subjects, historians usually list the school among the nineteenth-century institutions of higher learning in the state.

Over the years, the configuration of academic levels and courses at Saint Mary's has changed to meet contemporary demographic demands. In 1997, for example, the [Saint Mary's](#) ^[3] trustees voted unanimously to focus all of the institution's efforts on a boarding and day preparatory program for girls in grades 9 through 12, with an additional postgraduate year. The trustees saw this new focus as a direction that met the needs of the times and that continued the long tradition of preparing young women for success in college and life.

The Saint Mary's campus remains at its original location off of Hillsborough Street, in an oak grove not far from the State Capitol. The entire campus is listed in the [National Register of Historic Places](#) ^[8]. The 1857 Gothic Revival chapel designed by Richard Upjohn, the two buildings erected from stone left over from the capitol (1834-35), and Smedes Hall (1837) are especially striking. The student body (about one-third of whom are Episcopalians) numbers 400 and hails from across the nation and from several foreign countries.

References:

Salley, Katherine Batts, ed. *Life at Saint Mary's*. 1942.

Stoops, Martha. *The Heritage: The Education of Women at St. Mary's College, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1842-1982*. 1984.

Additional Resources:

Saint Mary's School Yearbooks: <https://lib.digitalnc.org/search?In=en&p=691:%22Saint+Mary%27s+School%22%20AND%20655:%22Yearbooks%22&sf=year&so=a> ^[9]

North Carolina Digital Publishing Office. "The Diary of Margaret Eliza Cotten." *MosaicNC.org*. July 2023. <https://mosaicnc.org/Margaret-Cotten> ^[10] (accessed September 23, 2023).

Image Credit:

Saint Mary's School, Raleigh N.C. Photo courtesy of Saint Mary's School website. Available from http://www.sms.edu/about_sms/index.aspx ^[11] (accessed May 1, 2012).

Subjects:

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Authors:

[Stoops, Martha S.](#) ^[13]

Origin - location:

[Raleigh](#) ^[14]

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Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.^[15]

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