

Ursuline Convent  
San Antonio  
May 20<sup>th</sup> 1877

My Dear Edith  
I must say that your letter gave me much pleasure as you had so long neglected to write to me I hope you will do what you said answer the letters immediately for I am always so glad to hear from you Yes I have a large pretty doll which I got Christmas I will bring it home and then we

will play so nicely to gether I thank you for asking me to stay with you in vacation I am willing to do so with pleasure I am taking music lessons since I am here at present I am practicing a duet for our exhibition which will take place the 15<sup>th</sup> of July please remember me kindly to your parents and for yourself accept much love from your loving friend Katie

In the letter to the left and transcribed below, Katie Nolan writes to Edith Grierson from boarding school, the Ursuline Academy in San Antonio. It is apparent that Katie had not heard from Edith in some time. Katie's father, Capt. Nicholas Nolan served with "A" Company 10th U.S. Cavalry under Col. Grierson. The Grierson letters indicate that the two families were friends as well, socializing often. One of Alice's letters reflecting this recounts a birthday party for Edith in which Katie ate too many of the El Paso grapes brought as a special treat by her father for the group and spent an uncomfortable night with a stomach ache.

1877 was a difficult year for the Nolans. Mrs. Nolan died of tuberculosis while Katie was off at school, leaving Capt. Nolan to raise her and her younger brother, Ned, by himself. Later that year, Capt. Nolan would endure a long and difficult scouting expedition that saw him and his troops lost and without water for several days.

### A letter to Edith from Katie Nolan

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Ursuline Convent as it stands today in San Antonio, Texas

The Ursuline Convent served as a boarding school for young women in the San Antonio area from 1851 to 1910. After Texas received independence from Mexico in 1836, the presence of the Catholic Church lessened in the new state. To combat this, a Bishop by the name of Jean-Marie Odin and his Ursuline nuns from a convent in New Orleans, established an academy in Galveston in 1847 to provide religious education and instruction for young girls. In 1848, Bishop Odin purchased 10 acres of land in San Antonio to build the Ursuline Academy that young Katie Nolan would attend. Officially opened in 1851, Father Claude Dubuis and seven Ursuline nuns ran the academy. The academy was built by a French architect named Francois Giraud with assistance from Jules Poinard in the traditional pise de terre, or rammed earth, method of construction. Within 50 years the academy grew to house a small chapel built in 1851, a dormitory built in 1866, a large Gothic-style chapel built by Giraud in 1868. The school soon offered education not only for boarding students, but for day students at well.

A second academy was built in 1910, but in 1965 the Ursulines left the area to relocate to northwest San Antonio. The academy fell into disrepair until 1971 when the San Antonio Conservation Society purchased part of the land. Over time, the academy was acquired by the Southwest Craft Center and restored. The center purchased the building across the street and the center changed its name to the Southwest School of Art. Currently, the school provides education for young and old alike through classes and workshops housed in the old Ursuline Academy campus. The original limestone buildings, stained glass of the chapel, and spacious gardens and courtyard along the river still stand as a testament to the beautiful and rich history of the Ursuline Academy.