

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

SAINT GERTRUDE'S COLLEGE, COTTONWOOD

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This academy and small college grew out of a Roman Catholic convent that has Swiss origins. In 1882, three sisters came from Saint Andrew's convent in Sarnen, Switzerland to Oregon to search for a site for an affiliated convent that might offer refuge in case anti-Catholic agitation should spread from other European countries into Switzerland and endanger their institution. In 1884, they started their Pacific Northwest convent in Uniontown, Washington (right next to North Idaho), and in 1888 they moved three miles to Colton. As their convent grew, they had to transfer to a still larger site that John J. Uhlenkott provided near Cottonwood in 1909. A decade later, construction commenced on an important new building--an operation that lasted from 1919 to 1924. An elaborate altar from Sigmaringen, Germany--provided by a company noted for religious art--followed in 1928. Designed to preserve a traditional Benedictine European architectural style, this building features south German towers and domes attractive to Cottonwood's notable German ethnic community. European donations of funds and facilities for an educational institution there make Saint Gertrude's Academy (that operated from 1927-1970) and College (which commenced in 1956 and continues to serve as Idaho's primary Roman Catholic educational center) a significant Swiss mission in Idaho. In addition, adult education classes are offered in association with University of Idaho and Lewis-Clark State College extension departments. An important North Idaho history museum collection, developed by Sister Mary Elfreda Elsonsohn, provides an added attraction there.

(This information has not been edited.)

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