

University of San Diego
President's Dinner

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Buddy - Hill Letters

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USD President's Dinner *The Buddy - Hill Letters*

NARR: Two figures in any history of the University of San Diego stand taller than life: The Most Reverend Charles Francis Buddy and Reverend Mother Rosalie Clifton Hill. Born on April 18, 1887 in Saint Joseph, Missouri, Charles F. Buddy was educated at the *Little Convent of the Sacred Heart* by the Religious of the Sacred Heart. After ordination to the priesthood in Rome, in 1914, Father Buddy returned to his home diocese of Saint Joseph where, as chancellor and later rector of the Cathedral, he worked to provide food and shelter for the homeless. In 1936, at the age of 49, he was appointed the first Bishop of the San Diego Diocese, which consisted of 36,000 square miles and almost 80,000 Catholics, with fewer than 90 clergy. The first message to the people of San Diego, conveyed his most basic philosophy:

BUDDY: *"I know of only one rule of government and that is the law of charity."*

NARR: Rosalie Hill was born on March 13, 1879 in Washington, D.C. to Peter and Nora Young Hill, whose ancestors had come from Europe to America and whose stories read like chapters in early American history. Mother Hill's great grandfather was Robert Livingston, a signer of the Constitution, and the person who administered the oath of office to George Washington. During the Civil War, Fenwick Young, Mother Hill's grandfather provided General Grant property and stables to house the northern army. Her mother Nora could recount numerous stories of the struggle for the city of Washington, and the night she heard the midnight calls announcing the assassination of President Lincoln. But it was her maternal grandmother, Elenora Carroll Livingston who set Mother Hill on the way "as a builder." She often visited the Hill home and nurtured a useful talent in little Rosalie.

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HILL: *"My grandmother showed me how to plan houses and rooms using quadrille paper which I would tirelessly cut and place in desired position. An ability which I was to use to great advantage in the years ahead."*

NARR: It was to be an act of Providence that brought these two bigger-than-life personalities together in the summer of 1942; he at the age of 55, and she at the age of 63. The following are excerpts from actual letters that traveled between them for some 15 years. The memories of Mother Aimee Rossi, the first academic dean at the College for Women are part of the narrative .

BUDDY: July 17, 1942. Reverend Mother Rosalie Hill R.S.C.J. San Francisco College for Women, Lone Mountain. Dear Mother Hill. For many years it has been my ardent hope to have both the Religious of the Sacred Heart and the Jesuit Fathers take an active part in building up Catholicity in this newly formed diocese where faith is weak and Catholic traditions sadly lacking. While building is out of the question at the present time, there is available a very desirable estate known as the Bridges Estate in Point Loma. Now let me respectfully inquire first, would you be interested in inaugurating a Catholic College for Women in San Diego; and secondly, would you be interested in the purchase of the above - described property? You are my first choice and the first one to whom I confide this important work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Your devoted servant in Christ, Charles Francis Buddy, Bishop of San Diego.

HILL: July 21, 1942. Your Excellency. Your letter of the seventeenth reached me yesterday. Since then your splendid proposition has been

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the subject of very earnest prayer. It would seem to us an immense privilege to found there under your guidance and with your help, the San Diego College for Women. We will gladly accept this work, if it meets with the approval of our Very Reverend Mother General in Rome. Before writing to her on the subject of this inspiring project, I would like very much to see Your Excellency and to talk it over with you. Very respectfully, Rosalie Hill, r.s.c.j.

BUDDY: July 28, 1942. Dear Mother Hill. Your cordial message of July 21 is heartwarming. Before suggesting a possible date for your journey to San Diego, please give me further time to line up several parcels of property so that if the Bridges Estate would not qualify, other investments might be considered.

HILL: August 7, 1942. Your Excellency. We understand that, owing to the pressing rapid war-time development of San Diego, it is most difficult to secure a property suitable to the needs of a college. Moreover, war priorities and regulations will prohibit, we know, all building at this time, as well as the remodeling of an old one, even if such were available. We know, too, from our own experience here at our San Francisco College for Women that it is difficult to purchase even the ordinary supplies for our science department. I think it will please you to know that we have already the vestments and altar linens and chalices for our Lord's Infinite Sacrifices. We have, too, five hundred books for the library. We hope to have ten thousand books before Your Excellency will give us the final word to open your college. I would like to add that we are making these preparations in the utmost secrecy. From all this you must not think, Your Excellency, that we are forcing you to hasten the establishment of the college.

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NARR: Then, nearly a year later, Bishop Buddy sent the following letter to Mother Hill on May 20, 1943.

BUDDY: Venerable and dear Mother Vicar. After many months of diligent searching, we have now three parcels of property ready for your inspection. Would you be pleased to visit San Diego as my personal guest during the week starting June 6 during which time you could view this property.

HILL: May 31, 1943. Your Excellency. Mother de Leon, our vicariate treasurer and I will arrive at San Diego by the Santa Fe train at three o'clock the afternoon of June eighth.

NARR: The three properties visited were 1) the Bridges Estate, 2) the property of the Theosophical Society of Point Loma, 3) the Clark property of approximately 15 acres. "It was unanimously agreed that of the three properties that of the Bridges Estate seemed the most desirable." Upon returning to San Francisco, Mother Hill wrote Bishop Buddy a rather lengthy letter on June 12th, 1943.

HILL: Your Excellency. As our train journeyed northward yesterday our thoughts traveled southward. It is difficult to express to you the gratitude that is in our hearts. No one could have done more for us than you did. We believe that we are interpreting the desires of our Very Reverend Mother General in saying that we are ready to purchase the Bridge's Estate for the San Diego College for Women as soon as Your Excellency will have submitted to us the final terms of the purchase and the manner of its accomplishment. The interim of waiting for the opening of the San Diego College for Women will be well utilized, we

promise Your Excellency. Would it not be well to allow the government to continue in possession of the Bridges Estate as a war office? A revenue would thus be assured us with which to meet taxes and expenses. This reminds me of a petition which Mother deLeon made to Your Excellency, namely that the present occupants be requested to water and care for the garden of the Estate during the time of their occupancy. Without this care, which the government can so easily give, the beauty of the garden will soon be lost. That Your Excellency deigns to call us to help you in your great work for souls moves us most deeply. We can only promise to cooperate with you humbly and with great heart and prayer.

BUDDY: July 7, 1943. Dear Mother Hill. You will be interested to know that through our agent, an offer has been made to the Bridges representative. The offer stated in effect that you would be willing to purchase the property for \$42,000 (they ask \$45,000) subject to a zone change permitting college and academic buildings. With sentiments of profound esteem and a triple blessing to all your Community.

BUDDY: September 22, 1943. Mother Hill. Points of difference at present are that the owners of the Bridges Estate in question wish to remove the organ or to receive \$1,000 for it. The second point of difference is, the owners claim any reimbursement from the Government for wear and tear. These two small points, however, can be easily ironed out.

HILL: September 24, 1943. Your Excellency. With regard to the organ we would not pay \$1,000 for it. It might not be a suitable instrument for liturgical needs. We will accept it as a gift, but will not purchase it at the above stated price. Should they desire to keep the organ, we

will expect them to remove it at their own expense.

NARR: "The rezoning of the Bridges Estate in the Point Loma area was a long and tedious affair, full of frustrations, and finally doomed to failure. At the meeting of February 1, 1944, the City Council turned down the rezoning request."

BUDDY: February 2, 1944. Dear Mother Hill. Yesterday morning our hearings were held before the City Council. After a two-hour session, in which the opponents grew very bitter, the Mayor and Councilmen voted - - - three in favor of rezoning and four opposed. The three councilmen who voted for us were really intelligent members of the Council. It could easily be seen, however, that they were outnumbered by ignorant politicians. While considering other possible measures to secure this property, we are not neglecting to explore other locations which may become available. Your devoted servant.

NARR: "This failure was in reality a blessing in disguise, as subsequent events proved." Two years to the day after Bishop Buddy's first communication to Mother Hill, he wrote her this prophetic letter.

BUDDY: July 17, 1944. Venerable and dear Mother Hill. For some time it has been my purpose to acquaint you with the latest developments. Studies made by our attorneys revealed, first, that we must exhaust every possible effort to obtain a rezoning; second, that we must either get an option to the property in question or actually own it. After waiting six weeks for a definite reply as to whether or not they would sell, the owners continued to delay and to put us off with rather vague excuses. We, therefore, concluded to revoke the escrow instructions

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and cancel altogether our contract to buy. Dear Mother Hill, this may all be providential because many requests have come from both priests and people that the new San Diego College and High School be placed in the east end of the city. We have been viewing different parcels of property in this section.

HILL: July 20, 1944. Your Excellency. When Your Excellency will have some desirable properties to show us, we will be glad to again visit San Diego.

NARR: For the remainder of that summer and into the fall and winter of the next year, Bishop Buddy and Mother Hill continually worked toward fulfilling their dream - he, persistently looking for new property and she, preparing many of the nuns with graduate studies, cataloging books for the library and purchasing equipment and furnishings for the College. "On January 21, 1945 Mother Hill, accompanied by Mother deLeon and Mother Williams, - the superior of the Convent at Menlo Park, set out for San Diego to inspect a tract of ninety-four acres situated between University Avenue and three blocks south of El Cajon Boulevard that Bishop Buddy had found." This is how Mother Hill described the experience to her superior, the Reverend Mother Datti in her letter of January 29, 1945.

HILL: Dear Reverend Mother. My last letter, written January twentieth, told you that His Excellency, Bishop Buddy, had invited us to again visit San Diego, to see some property there. As military restrictions made it impossible to secure immediate railroad reservations to San Diego, I decided to travel by automobile from San Francisco to San Diego. On the twenty-third in our automobile we followed Bishop Buddy in his car

seeing various properties in and around the city. When we reached the place, we left the automobiles and walked over the property. I did not like it at all. The hundred acres are undeveloped land and not in the best part of the city. It took some courage to tell this to our most kind and generous friend, Bishop Buddy, and to tell his four friends, but our Lord helped me to do so. Then we saw other properties, also, not desirable. The wise Bishop saw our reasons against the properties and was so understanding and kind. His Excellency offered the Mass for us. At the close he prayed to the Holy Spirit to enlighten him as what next to do. He did not at once tell us about his inspiration. Later in the morning, he called for us in his own large automobile. Then turning to us quietly, the Bishop said almost hesitatingly . . .

BUDDY: *"Reverend Mother I have a small house which was formerly occupied by my Junior Seminary, would you consider accepting it as a temporary residence, and come to San Diego and begin here some humble work, until such time until you could find the right locality on which to build your future San Diego College for Women? The house is yours to be occupied rent free, for as long as you care to use it."*

HILL: Arriving there in a few moments, we found a nice simple house standing on the corner of a property of about 150 or 200 feet. It is in the center of San Diego, in a part called "Old Town." Now, dear Reverend Mother, here are some permissions which I must ask you at once...

NARR: Mother Hill asked her superior for four things, permission to found the Convent of Saint Madeleine Sophie at San Diego, permission to go there herself and take seven other religious with her, permission to

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take \$25,000 from the General Fund to begin a foundation, and finally, permission to arrange properly the small auditorium on San Diego Avenue, which she had already promised the bishop she would do. The telegram from Mother Giulia Datti in Vatican City on March 27th 1945 was brief. It said simply, "Proposed Foundation approved!"

BUDDY: April 3, 1945. Venerable and dear Mother Hill. Painters and decorators will soon be making presentable your humble Convent of Saint Madeleine Sophie on San Diego Avenue.

BUDDY: August 17, 1945. Dear Reverend Mother Vicar. My first thought is to express sincere gratitude for your zealous interest, your generous giving of yourself to inspect so many and varied sites to determine the ideal location on which to build an academy and a college for women. Now that the city and it's suburbs have been thoroughly canvassed and all desirable and available places have been duly studied and appraised, our Catholic leaders are in full accord with your expressed opinion that the property known as the Pueblo Lands which, two months ago, were rezoned to accommodate the construction of higher institutions of learning, are the most practical for the purpose we have in mind. Twenty-two acres will be deeded over to the Society of the Sacred Heart absolutely gratis, with no obligations whatever on your part except that it be used for educational purposes. Please be assured that the Bishop stands ready to serve you in any capacity. With triple blessing, believe me always. Devotedly, your servant.

NARR: "On August 25, 1945, Mother Hill wrote to all the Religious of the Sacred Heart who had been helping her, announcing the gift from Bishop Buddy."

HILL: *"Upon first sight a truly inspiring Linda Vista stretched before us...all this loveliness is within the city limits of San Diego, in the northwest section of the city. It is called the Pueblo Lands...here in Linda Vista Heights, the Bishop has purchased a long mountain ridge, the plateau of which is more than a hundred acres. Here the Bishop plans to erect his Diocesan Seminary. Here he has invited the Resurrectionist Fathers to build a college and a school for boys. Now standing on those heights he said to me..."*

BUDDY: *"Reverend Mother, if you will build here a college and an academy for girls, I will give you fifteen acres of land, on any portion of the hill you may desire. The first choice is yours. Will you accept the fifteen acres?"*

HILL: *"Before answering, for a moment I prayed. Then beneath the blue heavens I said, 'I will accept in the name of the Society, and in that of our Mothers in Rome...he then told us of his hopes and desires to make on Linda Vista Heights, a great center of Catholic education.' Two days later the letter came confirming the gift, not only for the promised fifteen acres, but for twenty - two acres. Even this was later much increased, thanks to the unfailing generosity of the bishop."*

NARR: *"The joint venture was on. The name Alcala Park was chosen for the whole tract of land. In June, 1946, Mother Hill, with six religious, took up residence at St. Madeleine Sophie's Convent in Old Town, there to begin direct planning for the new college. She had long before decided in favor of an adaption of Spanish Renaissance architecture. She made a deep study of the subject and, as needed, produced some original designs for the decoration of the future*

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buildings.” Ground breaking ceremonies were held on the Pueblo Lands on May 1, 1948, but it was not until nearly a year and a half later on December 17, 1949 that the San Diego Union carried pictures of the first bulldozer to operate on the site of the future University of San Diego. On November 27, 1951, Bishop Buddy sent the following letter to Reverend Mother Louise Williams about Mother Hill.

BUDDY: Dear Reverend Mother. It is indeed marvelous how Reverend Vicar shows extraordinary strength and endurance in walking miles up and down stairs over five acres of buildings in the newly-constructed San Diego College for Women. In so many phases of this monumental work you will recognize Reverend Mother Hill's exquisite taste and splendid judgment. Most Gratefully in Christ, Most Reverend Charles F. Buddy. Bishop of San Diego.

NARR: Then on January 17 of the new year he wrote again to the Reverend Mother Louise Williams.

BUDDY: Dear Reverend Mother. You will rejoice with us that the dream of many years is about to be realized. Reverend Mother Hill has invited me to offer the first Mass on February 1 in the new San Diego College for Women. Thanks be to God for your esteemed Society, destined through sacrifice and many trials to honor the Sacred Heart through higher education.

NARR: Classes opened for the first time on Monday February 12, 1952 with an enrollment of fifty women.

BUDDY: May 14, 1964. Reverend Mother Ethel Teegarden, R.S.C.J. Superior.

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San Diego College for Women. Alcala Park. San Diego, California. Dear Reverend Mother. First, let me reassure you of the deep felt consolation that came to me yesterday in conferring the Last Sacraments on our dearly esteemed Reverend Mother Hill. Obviously, she had been enfolded with special graces and seemed to understand every part of the ceremonies. Let me share the devotion of your Community for this dear soul and her apostolate of over half a century. Devotely in the Sacred Heart. The Most Reverend Charles F. Buddy. Bishop of San Diego.

NARR: Rosalie Hill died December 12, 1964 at the age of 85. Charles Francis Buddy died March 6, 1966 in the 11th month of his 78th year.

HILL: September 20, 1957. Your Excellency. Seldom in this life do we find our inmost desires and plans realized - - but, yesterday, as Your Excellency stood at God's altar to invoke the Holy Spirit upon the Catholic youth of your flock, and as they approached to receive our Lord at your hands, a great wave of happiness and thanksgiving must have filled your heart, as it did ours, to see the reality of all your hopes take form . . .

NARR: Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Richard Easton and Ms. Katherine McGrath, Associate Artists of the Old Globe Theatre.

NOTE: Portions of the Narrative have been quoted from Mother Aimie Rossi's 13 page unpublished manuscript, "History of the San Diego College for Women."