Book Notice of *Always at the Frontier: Saint Louis University, 1818-2018*

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Always at the Frontier

Saint Louis University is celebrating its bicentennial with a roster of events from religious services to lectures to exhibitions and music programs. It has also published a beautiful book that explores the history of the school, which has been a major part of the history of Saint Louis since the town was a small but bustling frontier riverboat center and before Missouri was a state. The school was founded in 1818, three years before the Missouri Compromise of 1821 made way for Missouri’s admission to the union as a slave state. Saint Louis grew and the school grew with it, living through struggles and issues, leading, sometimes compromising, trying – though not always successfully – to keep Catholic principles active.

The book’s title clearly states its perspective: Always at the Frontier. From early issues of racism, through the Civil War – Missouri had both Union and Confederate armies – and wars of the early 20th century, through economic boom and bust, Saint Louis University has been a leading partner in the civic discourse. Very recently it was a leading voice for justice in the unrest arising from racial turmoil in suburban Ferguson.

The volume’s text makes use of a very impressive array of background scholarship, drawing on over 160 sources. The author is Dolores M. Byrnes, a researcher, writer, and anthropologist from Northern Virginia. Helping her was Fr. John Padberg, S.J., who has taught and been an administrator at Saint Louis and elsewhere and has published extensively in Jesuit history. And the second contributing author was John Waide, a SLU graduate who has served in the archives and library there for five decades.

The photos that illustrate the text are a fascinating witness to changing times and fashions and issues. From the early photos of Jesuits in their birettas to nursing students in white dresses and caps and capes to modern students in shorts and T-shirts, a visual history of changing trends and styles in American society moves through the pages of this beautiful book.